PlayStation 3 PSN PSP 演劇端末

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ISSUE NO 203
THE UNCHARTED ISSUE

exclusive
NINJA GAIDEN 3
"Bayonetta is outdated"

in-depth
PSP2
What the industry really thinks

interview
BIOSHOCK INFINITE
Creator gets brutally honest

WORLD EXCLUSIVE
UNCHARTED 3
DRAKE'S DECEPTION™
Mammoth blowout as Naughty Dog opens up with new inside info!

revealed
THE DARKNESS II
You won't believe the changes!

hands-on
L.A. NOIRE
It's a crime to miss out

new screens
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
We've got the hottest info

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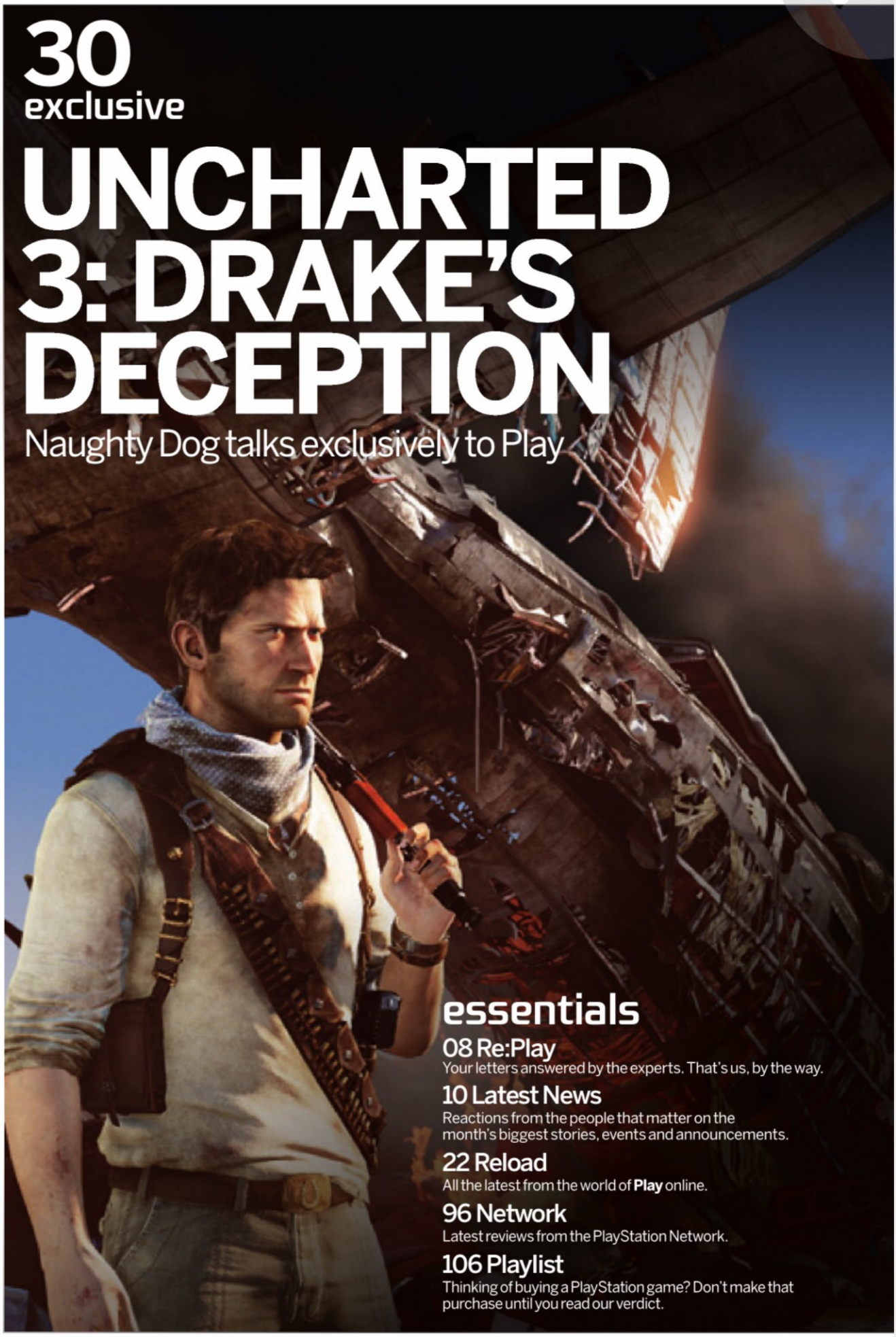

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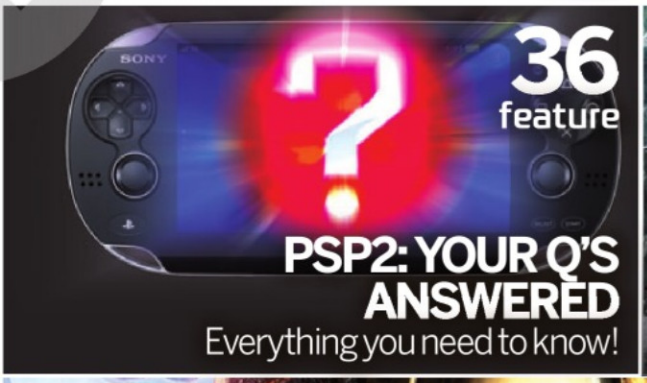

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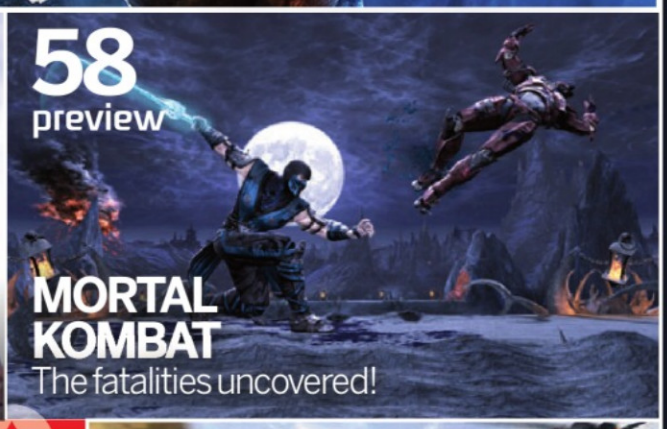

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Welcome PLAY

The UK's best independent PlayStation magazine

The best issue ever?

Do you read that grey strapline at the top? Have a look. The bit of writing above my bright pink face. There. That's right – this could well be the best issue of **Play** ever! Even better than the time we put *Gex 3D* on the cover back in 1998. It's *that* good.

We've fought long and hard to get some amazingly exclusive stuff in this issue and by jove have we succeeded. There are three monster exclusives in this issue. We have a huge look at *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* with input from none other than Naughty Dog itself, giving you insight on the development process as well as what it thought of the previous games in the series.

We also have a massive interview with Irrational Games' Ken Levine on all things *BioShock* after we managed to get the prolific developer on the phone, where he opened up with some searingly honest insight that you could only get from talking directly to the man himself.

Finally, we have exclusive industry reactions on NGP or PSP2 or That New PlayStation Portable Thing. It's not all positive, so it's definitely a balanced view from the people who'll be making games for it...

Just to add to this being the Best Issue Ever, which means I'm probably crying under the pressure of trying to create The Newest Best Issue Ever as you're reading this, we want you to send in any **Play** thoughts and feelings you have. Reckon Chris McMahon's reviews are funny? Want us to cover *Catherine* and niche games more often? In love with Ian Dransfield?

> This issue is even better than the time we put Gex 3D on the cover

Remember, this is *your* magazine and with **Play** now stretching its slightly chubby wings across Facebook, YouTube and Twitter (p22), you have more chances than ever to make your voice heard. We won't put *Gex 3D* on the cover again, though. Well... maybe. We'll see.

Enjoy.

Editor

contributors

Simon Miller

Miller went to Pizza Hut to celebrate his recent birthday, where the buffet failed to withstand repeated assaults from 14 hungry stomachs. Unsurprising. But oh, the fear on other people's faces! What the devil are they doing, they thought, watching us with our stained plates waiting for pizza, discussing things like 'kill zones' and 'bullet storms'.

Luke Albiges

Luke is **Play**'s partner in crime on *DC Universe Online*. Dressed as a lost metal warrior crossed with a viking (his character, not him), the leader of the Teampey league which celebrates victories by drinking and... more drinking. Teampey welcomes all new members, especially after someone randomly joined our league, stole our stuff, then quit again. Git.

Dave Shaw

In the beginning all was chaos and the Lord (or some random series of particles if you're not into religion) said, "Enough of this balls, let's have ourselves a universe." And so the world was born, but a small amount of chaos was left behind to remind us all of just how strange our origins were and where we will all one day return. We call this chaos Dave Shaw.

the PLAY promise

Play solemnly swears (raises right hand) to bring you the best PlayStation magazine that is humanly possible.

We will always bring you the most in-depth, impartial, honest reviews and will never bow down to PR or advertising pressure. We have some of the most experienced reviewers in the industry and we're not afraid to use them. And we take our own screenshots so you can see what the game looks like *when you play it*. We will be the first to break the biggest stories, the first to cover the biggest games and in the most detailed way. We will only ever bang on about the very best PlayStation games, the ones that we would pay our own cash for. We aren't afraid of expressing an opinion, especially when it's for your benefit. So don't expect our previews to simply regurgitate a load of internet or press release tosh – we'll be telling you whether a game is looking good or not, regardless of the stage of the code.

We want to fuel your passion for gaming like no other magazine and we want you to trust everything you read here. If you don't then you can simply stop buying it. That's how confident we are that you'll love **Play**. Promise.

PLAY

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RE:PLAY

Literal shooting stars, Power Loaders, the Singularity, Kratos in an apron – so much awesome on two short pages

This month's letters answered by: Chris McMahon 'Star Struck'

Today I saw a picture NASA took of a runaway star. Named Zeta Ophiuchi and 20 times the size of our own sun, this star once orbited around a heavier star, but when it went supernova Zeta Ophiuchi was shot away like a bullet. It's now rocketing through space at a speed of 24 kilometres per second. The image, which can be seen at http://bit.ly/gHGxX1, shows the interstellar juggernaut plowing through a large cloud of space dust. It got me thinking about the inconceivable immensity of space, and how small, inconsequential and ultimately pointless everything we do really is when compared to that vast, black, indifferent and unspeakably violent void.

Welcome to the letters page.

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★STAR letter

That movie magic

I was recently reading through issue 200 and I got to the *Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows* review, and after a good laugh at what appears to be a joke game I was reminded of a conversation I had with a mate about how movie tie-ins don't have to be rubbish. Games are getting increasingly cinematic, with *Uncharted* recalling *Indiana Jones* and *Dead Space* making you feel like you're trapped in *Event Horizon*. So why, when we have games that are based on movies and we have a chance of capturing that cinematic feeling, do they end up sucking and failing on the most basic of levels? It can't be that hard, why don't they just use models of existing games? Imagine how brilliant a *Blade* game would be if you took *Devil May Cry* and swapped out puppets for vampires and Dante for Blade? Or take the *Assassin's Creed* open-world free-running model and set it in a dark modern day Detroit and replace Ezio with Eric Draven, making an amazing *Crow* game! Let's stop wasting movie licences!
Gareth Taylor, Sherburn in Elmet

The *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* game was one movie tie-in we never expected to be so good.

Here's our suggestions: *Dance Dance Revolution* swapped out for *Black Swan*. *Call Of Duty: World At War* for *The Pianist*. *Gran Turismo 5* for *Driving Miss Daisy*. No? Shucks. We thought they were good at least...

The issue here is that movie tie-ins *do* use existing templates, they just do it really badly. These games are made on a limited budget, under strict time limitations, and must appeal to the lowest common denominator, so any average Joe who thought *Avatar* was "proper boss like" will be able to enjoy the game, too. With the production costs behind making a great game so high, we've not seen the end of bad movie tie-ins just yet.

Get a Move on

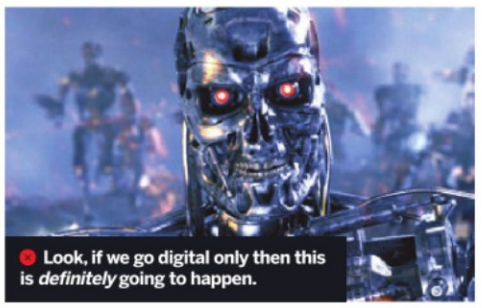
For my 12th birthday I received a PlayStation Move, *Sports Champions* and *Start The Party*, all of which I really enjoyed, but then soon realised a Wii MotionPlus controller could do it all just as well. Sony needs to incorporate some of the features from the PlayStation Move demo which presents technology we're not seeing used. For instance, the demos show a game where you throw fireballs, which could be used in a *Dragon Ball Z* game. There's also a Chameleon demo where you climb trees, which could be put into a *Spider-Man* game.
Jack Zottola, via email

Extraction is a great Move game, but even that appeared on Wii first.

We have to agree with you there, Jack. Even Move's best game thus far, *echochrome II*, could be played with a Wii Remote. We need better implementation of the technology in our games... something Move can do that no other motion control technology can. The tech demos for PlayStation Move have shown a lot of fantastic ideas that we simply haven't seen in its games – that Chameleon tech, for instance, could be used to control a Power Loader in an *Aliens* game. Come on, Sony. Get to it!

The shelving problem

I like to hold a new game in my hands, to look at it, flick through the manual, and it's for this tactile experience I think we'll always need our games on a disc, USB, Purple Ray, Xpando Doodas or whatever they come up with next. I'm all for digital downloads, but what's going to happen in the future when they no longer fit on our hard drives and the servers they were on no longer hold them? I hope the day never comes when all our music, movies, games and magazines like yours will be digital download only, because apart from the fact I love collecting these things, what am I going to put on my shelves in their place?
Stuart Gregory, Swansea



Look, if we go digital only then this is *definitely* going to happen.

Oh, Stuart. How naive you are. We actually used to agree with you, but

Write in, and win! Every full-length letter we print gets a free game, courtesy of EA. For each letter we used this month, the sender wins a copy of Fight Night Champion, which is out now on PS3 (£49.99). Age verification required.

STUPID letter

Message from legal: This is definitely not Vernon.

Our paper is fine, *Vernon*

My son recently visited from the UK and left **Play** magazine behind when he returned. I should imagine that it's a pretty good mag for the gaming buffs. For me, it's a very hectic, small print, and the paper is way too shiny. Reading it under spot down-lighters it's almost like a mirror. You have to tilt it at varying angles to obtain a clear read. Suggestion: use a matte finish paper.
Vernon J Lazarus, Johannesburg

Suggestion: don't diss **Play** or you're going to end up with Stupid Letter of the Month. Yeah, that's right, how do you like dem apples? We do commend you for your name, though, Mr Vernon Lazarus; you win Name of the Month alongside Stupid Letter of the Month. This is all rather pointless, though. The paper's probably too shiny for you to read anything. SHIELD YOUR EYES FROM THE BRIGHTNESS!

then a game manual gave us a pretty nasty paper cut. No more would we suffer the indignity of injuries sustained from physical media! We denounced all physical media from that point on and pledged ourselves to a digital-only future. We'll probably eat our words when the Singularity occurs, though. Our robot overlords will delete all of our games in the process of making us their lowly slaves. That'll really put that paper cut into perspective.

Cooking Kratos

I have just seen the trailer for *Mortal Kombat*! This could possibly be the best suited game for Kratos in the post *God Of War* timeline. Mostly because of *Mortal Kombat*'s notorious brutality and gore. I can only imagine the roster of moves he can perform will not be too far removed from the combos he used in all of the *God Of War* games. Imagine him on a massive high-definition TV duking it out with Sub-Zero. Epic! This is one of the greatest gaming unions I've ever seen.
Eoin O'Leary, via email

We're not so sure, Eoin. Maybe Kratos is fed up of all that killing and slaughtering. Did you ever think of that? Did you? DID YOU? Maybe what he really wants is a bit of a time out. We think he would be better suited to *Cooking Mama*. Cooking is therapeutic, comforting, and a pleasant thing to do for others. That's just what Kratos needs – more killing is just going to make him worse. As long as he doesn't put any raw Minotaur entrails into his Shepherd's Pie.

F.Y.I.

Dead Space 2's not really all that great, is it? You're just shooting stupid aliens in corridors. I wasn't even scared once.
Paul Rochfield, Hereford
You... you're making us so very, very angry.

Why do PlayStation 3 installs and updates take so long? It never takes the Xbox that long to install!
Keith Handles, Australia
Well, we believe the technical explanation is that gnomes need to carry each binary input to the core of the Earth, where Mother Gnome translates them into update data, which the gnomes then carry back. That's why we reckon the updates take so long anyway.

What's your favourite button on the PlayStation 3 pad?
Ashley Rogan, Yorkshire
Good question. It has to be the right input on the D-pad. It gets so little recognition for all the amazing things it does – it opens up inventories, calls up the HUD, selects a new weapon... oh, right input on the D-pad, where would we be without you?

THIS MONTH, YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

- Rubbish movie tie-ins **50%**
- The lack of excellent Move titles **40%**
- Xpando Doodas **10%**
- The vast, indifferent and violent void of space **0%**

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No quotes =(I'll just go and eat out my sorrows then
Robinz26

SUBJECT: OFF-TOPIC

Topic: Is it normal...???
To read the mag backwards?
rbl007

SUBJECT: GENERAL GAMING

Topic: Is it normal...???
no.
Mr healey

word on the tweet

IGLevine
"In two turns, you think Egypt's gonna pick Democracy, Despotism, Communism, Monarchy or the Republic?"
Political commentary by way of a *Civlization* reference. It could only be *BioShock* creator Ken Levine.

See, look how peaceful and at home he is just doing a bit of cooking.

The **BURNING** issues

The stuff we want to hear about!

1. **What innovative uses of Move can you think of?**
2. **How terrified are *you* of the Singularity?**
3. **Comments about how utterly *amazing* the paper in Play is**

NEWS

Where fact + opinion ÷ PlayStation = the truth

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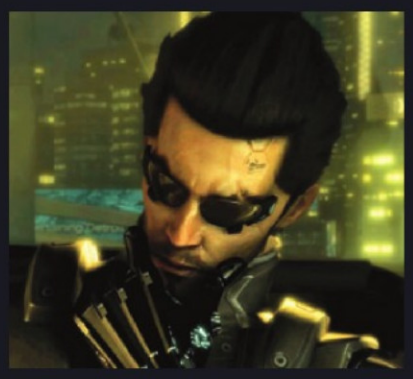

"Deus Ex can be perceived as brutal and it was a way to make killing more impactful" – Jean-François Dugas, director, Deus Ex: Human Revolution p. 13

opinion

WELCOME ABOARD

It's good to have the best in the business finally working on PS3, thinks Jon Gordon

WHILE NONE OF the developers we spoke to about PS3 development wanted to talk too much about working on PS3 versus other platforms, it struck us that for all of them the idea of not working on PS3 in some fashion just didn't make sense any more. The decline of third-party exclusives has been well documented, but fewer and fewer studios still attach themselves to a single format.

In the case of Epic and Valve this is particularly interesting as both are independent and have found a great deal of success working solely on Xbox 360 and/or PC. *Gears Of War* and *Left 4 Dead* both look likely to remain exclusives for the time being, but it would be surprising if either announced a new IP that avoided the PS3 in future.

For BioWare the story has become a little more complex since it was bought by EA, but the interest in the PS3 isn't purely financial. There's a curiosity we sense from a lot game makers about the console because of its raw power and the interesting way its hardware is configured. Some seem to look at it like a puzzle or challenge that demands to be solved and in these three cases Valve, Epic and BioWare seem to be coming out on top.

Valve's presence on PS3 is the one that excites me the most thanks to the additional support *Portal 2* will be receiving. The Steam network has proven to be a very successful way of selling games digitally and sharing content. The PS3, which has become known for its support of user-created content and community, could learn a lot from Valve's system and could do even better by adopting it wholesale. Chet Faliszek's comment that both Valve and Sony would be looking at how *Portal 2* performed before committing to more was interesting. There's much to be gained and risked for both companies and a great deal of potential to be tested.

But for us down at the bottom line, the one's who actually play the games and spend the money that pays for more in the future, seeing three such superb studios working and thriving on PS3 finally is very exciting. We look forward to seeing whether any of them has more to tell us in the coming months once their most immediate projects are put to bed.

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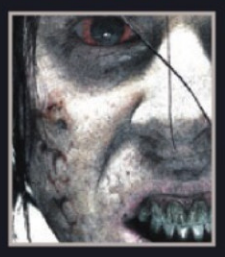
Need To Know IMPORTANT GAMING NEWS YOU WON'T WANT TO MISS



Cult comics coming

Telltale Games, the downloadable adventure game master, has announced it is adapting *The Walking Dead* and *Fables* comics for PC, Mac and consoles. *The Walking Dead* has found great success as a TV show made by AMC and is currently showing on the FX channel, while *Fables* is an award-winning series for DC comics.

inFamous 2 Hero Edition revealed

Sony has revealed two special editions for *inFamous 2*. The Special Edition will come with a lenticular 3D cover and codes to download the original Cole skin and a special grenade attack. The Hero Edition includes a replica of Cole's bag, Kessler skin and soundtrack.

Dragon Age web series inbound

A new webisode series based on *Dragon Age* has been announced starring *The Guild* creator Felicia Day. *Dragon Age: Redemption* was debuted on *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon* in the US and is set to appear online this summer, extending the *Dragon Age* franchise further.

word on the tweet

TimOfLegend
"Calling BS on *Dead Island* trailer! Zombie girls can TOTALLY survive long falls. Unless their head hits a sprinkler."

Double Fine's Tim Schafer has his reasons for distrusting the *Dead Island* trailer.

STAT ATTACK
150 million
PS2s shipped worldwide since launch

PS3 POWER TOO GOOD TO RESIST

Valve, Epic and BioWare talk up PS3 development

SPEAKING EXCLUSIVELY TO Play, representatives of three of the world's biggest developers have been explaining their positions on the PlayStation 3 and how they've each grown stronger with the console that once seemed alien to them. Valve, Epic and BioWare have each had some level of exclusivity or separation from the PS3 in the past, but are now supporting the console with all their might and making some of their best ever games.

In the case of BioWare and Valve, the games were ported to PS3 by external dev teams and not always to the highest standard. This is something both studios have been keen to change. "[*Dragon Age: Origins*] was the first PS3 title that the studio had done," *Dragon Age II* senior producer Fernando Melo told us. "With *Origins* it probably wasn't the most ideal way to do it. It was a port at the end. We were six years into a PC game and the consoles kind of showed that a little bit. As much as we worked with the external team there was only so much we could do with it. This time around we had a lot more in-house expertise having done *Origins*, we were able to do all three platforms at the same time and that's really starting to pay off."

> It was a new platform and a difficult and different system to jump into

Chet Faliszek, one of Valve's esteemed *Portal 2* writers, explained that Valve just wanted to do things properly after *The Orange Box* and avoid porting its games across again, which is one of the reasons *Left 4 Dead* has yet to appear on the console. "We're just really excited that we're coming to the PS3 platform in the right way, we're bringing the right things to it and we're doing it our way with Sony totally backing us."

One of the 'right things' Valve is introducing is Steam support which could have a massive impact on the future of the PlayStation 3, but Faliszek told us that both Valve and Sony want to see how *Portal 2* performs first. "On the PC if you look at *Team Fortress 2* and how that started and how it kept expanding and what it became, we often just start with little tests," was the example he gave us. "We'll say, 'this is good, we understand the value of this, so what else can we do?' We'll learn a lot from [*Portal 2* on PS3] and we'll take that going down the road and we'll expand on it or change it or whatever. I think both sides will learn from that."

For *Gears Of War* creator Cliff Bleszinski the approach has been very pragmatic. Now working with People Can Fly on his second PS3 game in the form of *Bulletstorm* he told **Play** how he's felt about working on the format again. "For me, I helped out somewhat when we made *Unreal Tournament III* for PS3, then it's been a while having had such a great partnership with Microsoft with *Gears* and then to have something I've been able to help out with come to PS3 is kind of surreal," Bleszinzki admitted. "I think it confuses a lot of the Xbox 360 fanboys. But hey, it's a great console, it's got some great games and especially launching a new IP you want to hit big as far as PC, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. And from Epic being an engine provider it makes sense for our product to be on PS3 as often as possible."

For all three studios it's been about breaking away from the ways of the past and adapting to a new format. Melo summed things up for BioWare, although his assessment would likely apply to all three developers. "I don't think that we neglected them [PS3 gamers] on purpose or anything like that, it was just a reality that it was a new platform and a difficult system or at least a different system to jump into, so it took us a while to get up to speed," was his take on things. "Each game that we come out with is going to help us improve our pipelines, our engines and that's going to make them even better."

And so now all these ex-360 exclusive developers are working on and pushing the PS3 and we're enjoying the spoils. It's yet more evidence of the exciting times we have in store on PS3.

Obituaries

It's been a sad start to the year for the games industry

> GUITAR HERO (2005 - 2011)
Activision announced last month that it is officially disbanding the *Guitar Hero* brand. Having launched on the PS2, *Guitar Hero* was the breakout rhythm-action music game, bringing a second lease of life to the console while also spawning a multimillion-pound franchise that included spin-off titles like *Band Hero* and *DJ Hero*. Despite peaks of 15.5 million sold at one point the series had been in decline for a couple of years, resulting in particularly underwhelming sales of *Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock*.

> TRUE CRIME: HONG KONG (2009 - 2011)
From the maker of *ModNation Racers*, United Front Games, we all raised an eyebrow when *True Crime* was announced as making a comeback. However, we were sold on the idea and even gave it a **Play** cover back in issue 191. Unfortunately, after only 14 months since it was announced Activision decided to cut its losses and stop production of the game. "We are sorry we did not get a chance to complete this project with Activision, but we understand why," A UFG statement read. "We are both committed to doing quality games and nothing less."

> BIZARRE CREATIONS (1994 - 2011) Forever remembered by Dreamcast owners as the maker of *Metropolis Street Racer*, by Xbox fans as the team behind *Project Gotham Racing* and to everyone else as the maker of *Geometry Wars*, Bizarre Creations has been making videogame favourites for years. Sadly, its two most recent releases, *Blur* and *007: Blood Stone*, didn't perform as well. Activision bought the Liverpool-based dev in 2007, but given its commercial failures and without any buyers, chose to close it last month.

"Action games are outdated"

Ninja Gaiden III looking to shake up genre, says Team Ninja

The action genre is becoming stale and outdated, according to *Ninja Gaiden III* producer Yosuke Hayashi and Team Ninja is looking to revitalise things with the return of Ryu Hayabusa. Without Tomonobu Itagaki at the helm many wondered what would become of Team Ninja and the *Ninja Gaiden* series, but it seems that Itagaki's departure has led to a new sense of commitment and ambition. It has also led to a ruthless assessment of its previous efforts.

"I think *Ninja Gaiden II* is already outdated," Hayashi said. "That's why we are making *Ninja Gaiden III* from scratch." And his assessment didn't stop at his own games. "*Bayonetta* has some good stuff but *Bayonetta* is old, game design wise, already," he said.

The focus for the Team Ninja development team then is to create a fresh new experience that focuses in on main character Ryu Hayabusa and is not by the traditions of the series to date. "First, we can say difficulty level is not the main element we are focusing on," Hayashi explained. "The focus we have is that a new Ryu Hayabusa is the main character for *Ninja Gaiden III*. Also, we are aiming to be the number one 3D action game. If we can do that we are fine not focusing on difficulty level. We don't care. But to prevent misunderstanding, *Ninja Gaiden* fans will still really love it. That is our responsibility. We make sure the fans of the series are satisfied by our game."

Cole's new home explained

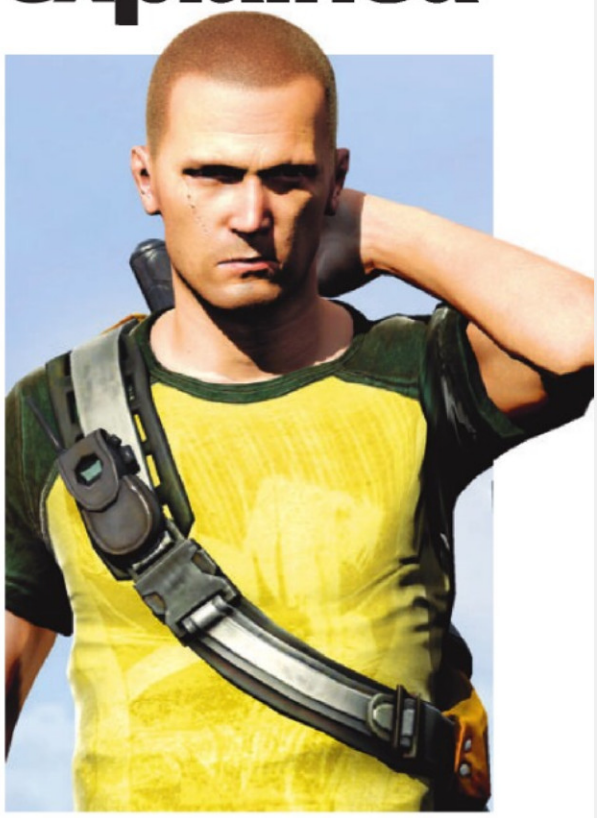
Sucker Punch talks about its new city for *inFamous 2* and the challenges of creating a true superhero

Finding the right setting for your superhero is hugely important, according to Sucker Punch producer Brian Fleming, who is currently working on relocating his hero Cole MacGrath in *inFamous 2*.

"The cities in the *inFamous* games have two important roles to play," he said. "First they set the mood and scene. Empire City (home of *inFamous 1*) was a New York-inspired city. We chose it because it felt like an appropriate birthplace for a superhero fiction to begin. For *inFamous 2* we wanted to give players new places to explore."

The second role of these cities is to be a playground for Cole and, in this respect, New Marais has been designed around MacGrath's abilities. "Construction wise, the city is designed to be beautiful and thoroughly appropriate for Cole to climb on and explore," Fleming told us.

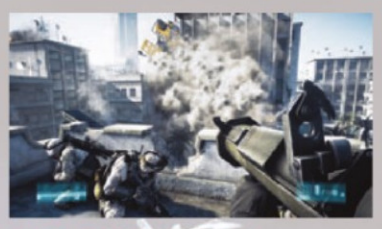
Sucker Punch has also fought hard to keep to superhero conventions, even if it seems to go against a certain amount of logic on its part. "The biggest case I can remember was during the dev of *inFamous 1*, when we had experimented with Cole carrying a gun," Fleming said. "We struggled with that because it seemed an obvious thing for him to want to carry in a city that's falling apart. In the end we rejected that because it made Cole just another gun-toting third-person action character – he lost his superhero mojo somehow. When we'd solidified around the electricity-based power set, one of the plusses was the obvious inability to safely carry a gun, which gave us a good *reason* he couldn't use them. A happy accident!"



REASONS WHY...

Battlefield 3 can take on Call Of Duty

HEY GOOD LOOKING We all like graphics. We keep a few spare on us at all times, but *Battlefield 3* is almost impossibly gorgeous with some extraordinary draw distances. The lighting looks to be superb, giving everything an authentic look and from guns to boots, every texture seems spot-on.



GODS OF DESTRUCTION It's hard to believe, but DICE is actually upping the destruction levels yet again with *Battlefield 3*. One way you'll see this is through earthquakes in the main game, tearing through roads and bringing down entire buildings. No skeletons this time.

POKER FACE While the *Bad Company* spin-off games have been played largely for laughs (by way of some bigger picture satire and commentary) *Battlefield 3* is a much more serious game. Set in the near future it deals with real places and potentially very real issues in the Middle East.

MIRROR IMAGE Developer DICE is bringing a lot of the first-person features from the impressive *Mirror's Edge* into the *Battlefield* series for the first time. You'll be seeing a lot more of your character interacting with the world around him, touching walls and objects. It all helps with creating the sense of immersion.

BIGGER AND BETTER DICE is promising bigger maps in *Battlefield 3* than we've seen in the *Bad Company* games to help compensate for a lot more vehicles. Among them will be jet fighters for the first time, which should be an interesting addition.

Deus Ex: brutally violent

Killing people shouldn't be inoffensive, says developer

Violence in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is all about making you feel the consequences of your actions, according to the game's director Jean-François Dugas. Eidos Montreal wants you to understand the brutality of the killing by making it graphic, but is happy to concede that some gamers might simply get a kick out of it.

"Well, [*Deus Ex*] can be perceived as brutal and it was a way to make killing more impactful," Dugas said. "Killing people shouldn't feel inoffensive and that's what we tried to convey. When I play, I rarely kill NPCs because it's not me. However, some players won't have that kind of involvement with the game and if they have a blast, we knock out two birds with one stone."

Getting that message across will prove a challenge as many gamers may miss the point of why the game goes to such extremes, but if done correctly it could be an interesting idea.

It's not the only challenge for *Human Revolution*, though, according to Dugas. "We had to create a hero and a conspiracy-based story while making sure it would resonate on an individual level," he told us. "Working the 'show don't tell' philosophy in the levels was also crucial to support the narrative and the message that has been quite challenging."

QUESTION

What's all the fuss about Dead Island?

LAST MONTH YOU may have heard a lot of talk about a game called *Dead Island* and wondered from where exactly this very exciting title had emerged. What exactly is this zombie game that seems to have captured the minds of so many gamers and beyond?

It's got zombies

As the game name hints this is all about the undead and as is common among such games you need to smash them in their faces. It's all about survival, a bit like *Dead Rising*, but without a lot of the silliness you see in that game. This takes zombies seriously.

It's on an island

Fighting off those peckish fiends in an enclosed environment just makes for good gaming so *Dead Island* has picked a luxury resort on the fictional island of Banoi. This means there is only so far you can run before you simply hit ocean with nowhere else to go.

Bound in blood

Call Of Juarez developer Techland is actually the studio behind this game. It originally revealed it back in 2007, but recently got it signed by Deep Silver. Techland is also making the latest *Call Of Juarez* sequel, *The Cartel*, for Ubisoft.

Slay together

Four player co-op is the order of the day on *Dead Island* although you can also play it solo. Each of the survivors is supposedly immune from the zombie infection that has swept through the island and created this horrible mess.

Movie magic

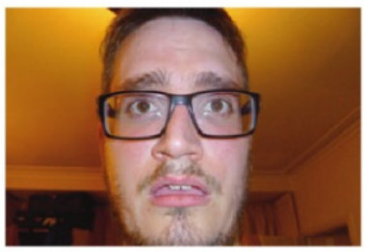
Just after Deep Silver took over as publisher, an animated CGI trailer was created by Axis, Audiomotion, Digital Imaging and Savalas. This trailer showed a family being attacked by zombies and resulted in a huge internet reaction.

ANSWER:

Mainly a trailer that has little to do with the game

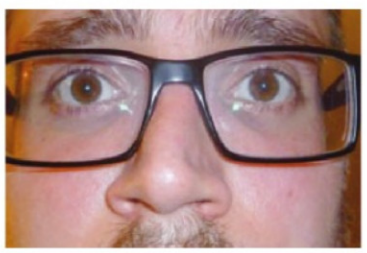
Fitness Quest IX

MONTH TWO: the effort embiggens

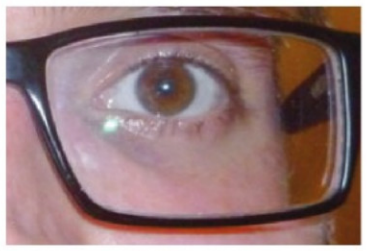


LOOK UP THERE, above. You'll see something has changed. It's no longer month one, we've actually been able to move it to month two because Ian got off his porky rump and did some squats in front of his television. Will wonders never cease? Probably not, no. Will Ian continue to jog loudly in the confined space of his living/bedroom? We can but hope, as it's funny to see him unable to walk properly.

With beginning The Greatest Review Of Anything You've Ever



Read In Your Lives, we are now capable to comment more than we did during the actual review of the game. First of all by clearly stating: it is not a game. Not in the usual sense, at least – there are many arguments as to why it actually *is* a game, but who can be bothered going into them? No, this is a fitness programme, and not in the same way *Wii Fit* 'is'.



The main difference, according to Fatticus Dransfieldicus, is that where Nintendo's balance board has you standing on one leg for four hours with the aim of losing 12 stone, *EA Sports Active 2* has you running. A lot. This shouldn't come as a surprise, but it did. Ian tells us he now understands why the game got such a good mark – it looks to be doing something... *positive*. You'll all have to wait, as enthralled as ever, for next month's episode where we'll see a – dun dun dunnnnn – *weigh in*.

word on the tweet

Jonatchoo
"*Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* has shipped 6.5 mil copies around the world Ubisoft announces. Word 2 Ubi Montreal, & word 2 Montreal game biz."

It's one big Montreal love-in for Eidos Montreal's *Deus Ex* art director Jonathan Jacques-Belletête.

Lara Croft speaks

Alison Carroll reveals her feelings about the new Tomb Raider

In an exclusive chat with **Play**, former Lara Croft model and all-round action woman Alison Carroll has reflected on her experience putting on the shorts and holsters of one of gaming's most iconic characters and given her impression of the latest *Tomb Raider*. As things stand it looks likely that Carroll will be the last person to portray Lara Croft day to day, with Crystal Dynamics moving the game in a new direction, but she likes what she's seen so far all the same.

"She looks so real, doesn't she?" Carroll said, echoing how impressed many gamers were with the new look for *Tomb Raider*. "I am very excited about playing the game."

But, while her time as Lara Croft was somewhat short-lived, she seems to feel nothing but positive about the experience. "It was hard work, but it gave me the opportunity to travel the world and experience countries I could only ever dream of going to," she told us. "Not only that, I got to perform crazy stunts, such as rock climbing, scuba diving and drive a Maserati around a racetrack. What other kind of job enables you to do such adventurous activities, meet amazing people and have the time of your life?"

There were some stranger moments, though. "I remember in South Africa being chased by security because I had weapons on me... that was kind of scary," she told us. Alison Carroll is now establishing herself as an actress having starred in *The Kid* last year and she also has an action film and romantic comedy on the horizon. Keep an eye out for those.

Read More!
Read our full interview with Alison Carroll online at www.play-mag.co.uk

YOUR SAY

A Need For Creed — What do you want to see from AC III?

UBISOFT IS GEARING up for the next *Assassin's Creed* and what could well be a final chapter in the story of Desmond and his fight against the Templars. We expect the *Assassin's Creed* brand and franchise to outlast Desmond and carry on for some years to come, but *Assassin's Creed III* could well see a lot of the story so far draw to a close. With that in mind we asked you what you wanted from this blockbuster sequel.

I would like a storyline massively removed from reality; an educated adventure about a collection of numbers and a man sitting in a chair, while a man shouts his name over and over again. A bit like Maths **– Scrum**

The hunt for Bin Laden of course... **– robinz26**

I would like to see the storyline pushed further. For example a cool twist to the ending could be the memories experienced in the previous games could have been from a pig that was forced into the Animus. Then in the next game the pig would have learned all of the techniques to being an expert assassin **– kev schmit**

The ending of *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* was ridiculous, IMO. There are too many loose ends to be tied up in one game, but I hope we've seen the end of Ezio. As much as I like the Renaissance-set games, two is enough. Wouldn't mind to see it transported to Japan in around the 1700 or 1800s. There's a lot of myth and legend there to be toyed with **– the bossman**

Visit www.play-mag.co.uk/forum to have your say

Part of the NOW Gamer Network

INSTANT EXPERT

All of the pros with none of the prose

COMPETITIVE
The Xperia Play actually compares favourably with the PSPgo in size and performance. Its screen is 0.2 inches larger, but its overall size is smaller, while battery life is about the same.

TIME TO PLAY
At the time of going to press there was no official price for the Xperia Play, but speculation placed it somewhere between £520 and £550. However, with a contract that's likely to come down significantly.

PLAYSTATION PHONE
Rumours of a PlayStation Phone being developed by Sony Ericsson have been around for years, with a particularly heavy wave of internet speculation over the last six months. It was finally revealed at the Mobile World Congress.

XPERIA PLAY

Manufacturer: Sony Ericsson
Networks: O2, Vodafone, Orange, T-Mobile and Three
ETA: April

WHITE KNIGHT
If you fancy this phone in white instead of the now classic PlayStation black you'll need to get it from O2 as it has signed that colour phone exclusively.

GAMER'S MOBILE
The key difference between this smartphone and most others is of course the flip controls that click out from under the phone much like the PSPgo.

BUTTON BASHER
Instead of analogue sticks the Xperia Play has a touchpad that should do a similar job. However, the buttons work exactly the same as a DualShock making typing and navigating very simple.

SUITE HEART
Alongside the announcement of the NGP came word of the PlayStation Suite, bringing current and retro PlayStation games to all Android phones. That will include the Xperia Play with its PlayStation buttons.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF MOBILE PHONES?
The operating system for the Xperia Play is Android, created by Google and fast becoming the most popular format for mobiles in the UK. It's considered to be more versatile than Apple's iOS for the iPhone.

STAT ATTACK
4 million
PS3s sold in the UK

DOS & DON'TS

Important lessons from Play this month

Read our reviews of all these games starting on page 71

DO: Spend some time learning how to use *Dragon Age II*'s combat system. It's not as easy as *Mass Effect 2*'s, but is a lot of fun.

DON'T: Get all high and mighty about *Bulletstorm*. Just enjoy it. It's not something to be writing essays about.

DO: Keep your fingers crossed that the online issues we experienced playing *Test Drive Unlimited 2* are fixed in the near future.

DON'T: Leave your chin exposed on *Fight Night Champion* or you'll get your head knocked off your shoulders like we did.

WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

Stuff is just stuff, but we still want stuff

1 PS2 classics
There have been rumblings of possible PS2 classics coming to PSP, which we found a bit weird. What would make more sense would be to put PS2 classics on PSN, for a nice price, ready for us all to download through our megapipes. That's all we ask.

PlayStation Suite

2 To know what the hell's going on with PS Suite
Right now, at the time of writing, there's not much information about what the hell Sony is doing in the near future. Tablets, Androids, NGPs and other stuff, all working together to make soup or play games or something. Information, people!

3 Mods
Jailbreaking your PS3 may lead to naughty things, but something interesting has come from it. Hackers found that mods for *Oblivion* and *Fallout* from the PC version work on PlayStation 3. This is an avenue we want to see explored officially.

4 Cross game chat
Because we haven't asked for it in a while, and it still irks us that we don't have it. Sort it out, chaps and chapettes.

5 Android devs on PSN
We actually want this so badly we haven't let it slip off the list this month. What would bringing Android apps – suitable ones, at least – to PSN be apart from great? *Nothing*, that's what.

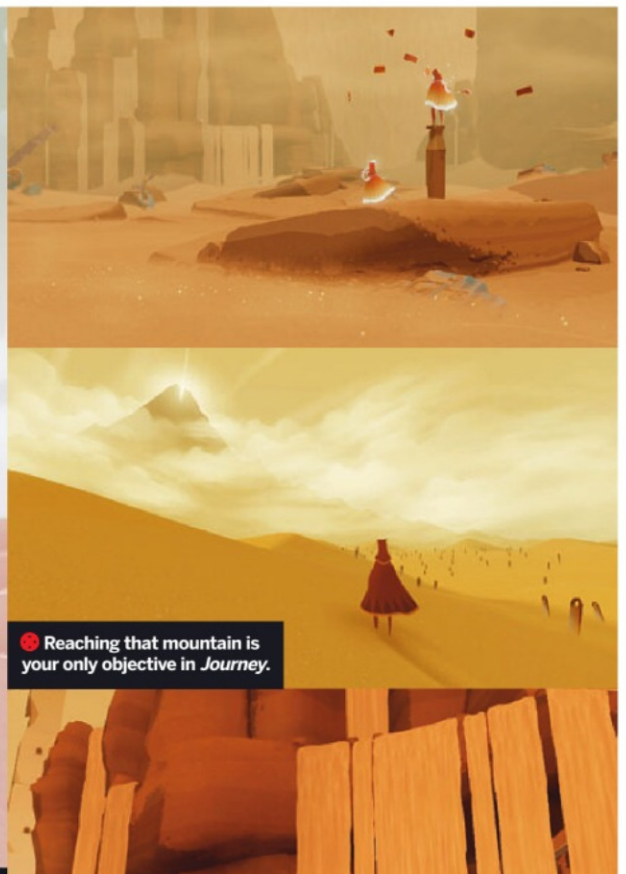
WWWTS news:

After a particularly passionate plea for more genuine classics in the 'PSone classics' range, it was soon announced that *Ridge Racer Type 4* would make its way to PSN. That, chums and chumettes, is a genuine classic.

Journey

Q&A

Play sits down for a chat with thatgamecompany president Kellee Santiago and creative director Jenova Chen to unravel the mystery of Journey



Reaching that mountain is your only objective in *Journey*.

***Journey* really impressed us when we saw it demoed at gamescom – what sort of feedback have you had since you've started showing it to people?**

KS: What's been the most exciting thing has been the support from all of our new fans that found us through *Flower*. At the same time, it puts pressure on us to make sure we live up to their expectations.

Your games are all about emotional experiences – what are you hoping people will get from *Journey*?

JC: *Journey*'s inspiration starts from the sense of wonder – we want to make the player feel small, and the world feel grand. However, the overall experience is more varied rather than a singular emotion. A rollercoaster ride of emotions is what we hope to deliver.

Have you found that people are struggling with the concept behind the game or do they seem to be getting it quickly?

KS: *Journey* is a concept that isn't as transparent as *Flower*. I think, in some ways, a lot of what was being communicated in *Flower* could be felt in a few seconds. *Journey* is a more nuanced experience. Hopefully, players will feel invited in to discover these additional layers in the world.

Do you feel people understand thatgamecompany better after the success of *Flower* than they seemed to before?

KS: Absolutely. I think people didn't know quite what to expect from us after *flOw*. Maybe we were going to be focused on somewhat ambient, electronica-styled experiences? *Flower* definitely shifted the perception of who we are as a studio. I expect that *Journey* will shift it once again, and I hope that we always surprise our audiences with what we have in store for them.

Although very different in terms of gameplay and 'genre' to what you've done before, would you say *Journey* is still typical of the kind of game thatgamecompany is interested in making?

JC: It still is. thatgamecompany's goal is to push the boundary of a videogame's emotional experience. And when you do that, it means the work you are doing has very little references in the past. Experimentation and exploration in the game mechanics is a necessary step in our development process. *Journey* is somewhat of an adventure game and many of the things we are trying are unprecedented so there is an element of experimentation and risk, but no less for *Journey* than any other thatgamecompany game.

Do you have a sense yet of what direction your next project(s) may go in or do you tend not to think about such things until your current work is completed?

KS: We're just totally focused on *Journey* right now.

> I hope that we always surprise our audiences with what we have in store for them

Would you ever consider working on a disc release? Do you feel digital is better suited to your approach and the aims of the games you're making?

KS: We are not opposed to a disc release, but I think downloadable will continue to be our main focus. It allows for more flexibility at every level – from team size and development schedule to genre and price point. It puts games directly in the hands of gamers, letting them decide for themselves what they like. It also allows us to connect more directly with our audience, which is something that we want to continue to build upon going forward.

Even though it has multiplayer, *Journey* is about making you feel alone.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

word on the tweet

benjamesward
"Bye bye #bizarrecreations. You introduced me to so many great people, taught me so much, and made me smile almost continuously for six years."

Ex-Bizarre Creations employee and all-round top bloke Ben Ward says his farewell.

MotorStorm team evolves

Course creation team had to double in size to make Apocalypse

Talking to **Play** about the development process behind *MotorStorm: Apocalypse*, game director Matt Southern revealed how the entire make-up of the Evolution Studios team needed to be changed to make the dynamic, urban courses that will be this sequel's centrepiece. The *MotorStorm* developer has seen its action racing formula evolve since its launch on PS3, but had to take a completely different approach to things in order to meet its own expectations for *Apocalypse*.

"As we got better and better at it we started to realise what was going to be required," Southern explained to us as he described the realisation of the task Evolution had given itself. "We essentially recruited an entire new team alongside our architects – architects being the name we give to our world builders. We quickly realised we were going to need to augment that team with an events team. We now have a team that consists of animators and a couple of physics experts, because we tried different approaches to balance animated objects against more emergent, physics-based events, and it took us a long time to find the sweet spot there."

> We've put a lot of effort into making the overall rhythm of the game as varied as possible

The next hurdle has been getting as much variety and originality out of the tracks that have been made without creating a mountain of work for the dev team. "It's accepted that a team can only make so many tracks, and in order to get a decent amount of gameplay out of them you're going to have to revisit them," said Southern. "But what we're really pushing for here is that when you revisit tracks, the damage is persistent, and has actually been exploited by the fictional organisers of MS. There won't necessarily be subsequent quake events on that track, for example, you might have a track where there's a big earthquake and when you revisit it there's a huge battle between the private military and the looters that causes even more destruction. But if every single track was as insane as the one that we showed when we revealed the game then the concept could get quite tired. We've put a lot of effort into making the overall rhythm and flow of the game as varied and as interesting as possible."

Did Evolution succeed? You can find out in our review on page 84.

Second chance for Section 8

Downloadable future to give shooter new lease of life?

Section 8 developer TimeGate is confident that a digital release of its sequel *Section 8: Prejudice* could prove to be a 'game changer' after a similar release of the first game on PSN.

TimeGate president and CEO Adel Chaveleh spoke to **Play** about his hopes for the game and what his team learnt from the first release.

First we asked whether or not he felt a similar digital-only release for *Section 8* might have helped with its reception in 2009. "Well, it might have benefitted us," Chaveleh admitted. "We're very proud of our first foray into developing an original FPS, but we would have liked for it to have been reviewed better and reached a wider audience. This is the goal for *Prejudice*, and honestly it is a much better game at quarter of the price, so we hope it will all work itself out in the end. If we are going to reach a much bigger audience with one of the two games, we're glad it's this one."

Even though it's 'only' a downloadable game, TimeGate has still managed to add a lot more to the title, with more multiplayer modes and a more in-depth single-player experience. "*Prejudice*'s campaign lasts a good five hours and tells a more elaborate story," Chaveleh said. "The boss battles are pretty epic, and we're excited to see how the campaign upgrade will turn out."

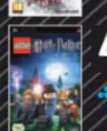
PLAY Charts

Cataloguing everything that's big in the world of PlayStation

PS3 CHART

	1 NEW	**Killzone 3** Sony The return of Sev and co didn't match our expectations. Still, fans are getting a lot from it.	80%
	2	**Call Of Duty: Black Ops** Activision The new DLC seems to have appeased disgruntled PS3 *COD* players.	94%
	3	**FIFA 11** EA The action from the Premier League and Champions League should see *FIFA* through to May.	91%
	4	**LittleBigPlanet 2** Sony We expect *LBP 2* to hang around as the community levels get more attention.	96%
	5 NEW	**Bulletstorm** EA Big bangs are what gamers like and there are few games that deliver them like *Bulletstorm*.	86%
	6 NEW	**Dragon Age II** EA BioWare shows again that it is beginning to find its way around the PS3.	86%
	7 NEW	**Fight Night Champion** EA *Fight Night Champion* is another sterling EA performance that boxing fans are lapping up.	88%
	8	**Gran Turismo 5** Sony After months of dominance *GT* takes a stumble as the hardcore have made their purchase.	85%
	9 NEW	**Marvel Vs Capcom 3** Capcom Fighting fans are enjoying a season of fantastic gaming at the moment, especially from Capcom.	88%
	10	**Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood** Ubisoft *Brotherhood* is beginning to fade away a little now.	91%

PSP CHART

	1	**FIFA 11** EA The NGP could well be the best thing that ever happened to portable *FIFA*. At least we hope it will.	69%
	2 NEW	**Ben 10 Ultimate Alien: Cosmic Destruction** D3 Publisher We don't know much about *Ben 10*, but it seems popular.	NA%
	3 NEW	**Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together** Square Enix The world of JRPGs still has a solid fanbase on PSP.	81%
	4	**Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4** Warner Bros. *Potter* fanatics just won't let this one go. Expect more from Lego Harry in the near future.	NA%
	5	**Football Manager 2011** Sega SI will be delighted about the NGP as it can finally make some big changes to *Football Manager*.	NA%

*This chart is compiled from sales, our opinions and the games you're playing. If you're playing a recent, quality title that isn't on our chart, head on over to the forum and let us know about it.

opinion

WHY VOLUME WINS THE FLAME WARS

There's no time for arguments here

Opinions are like body parts we shouldn't talk about in public, we've all got them and regardless of whether or not we should be sharing them we all have a little too much to drink and start flashing them at strangers. It's just the way things are.

YOU NEED AN OPINION NOW GODDAMMIT!

In this age of the internet, your opinion has become just about the most valuable thing you can have and with the speed of things you need to decide upon one faster than you can read the name of whatever game it is you have to be decided upon. There can be no waiting around to deliberate or digest the facts. You need an opinion now goddammit!

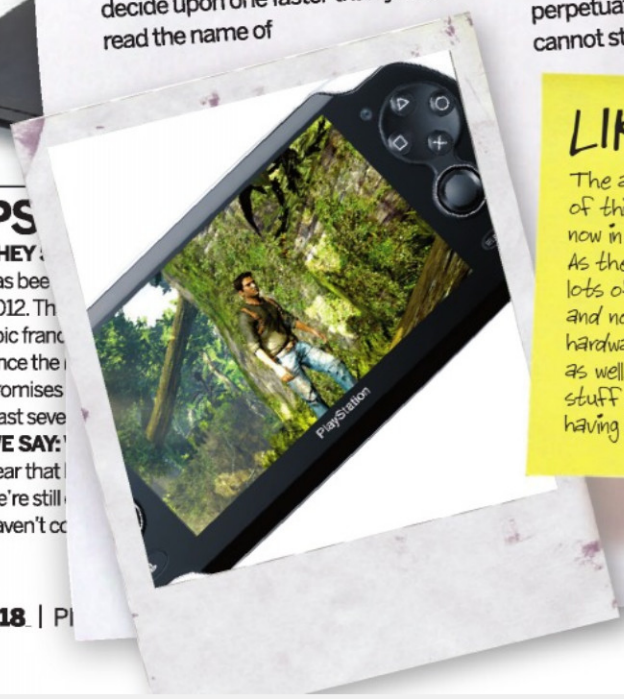
Now this is where being a fanboy for all things PlayStation, like me, comes in handy. You see I have a default position – "I love PlayStation and all its affiliates" – and as such I can attack any argument from a position of strength. No one can stand up to the might of my arsenal of belief in all things P and S.

As my enemies circle my position I release a torrent of my self-perpetuating anger and bile. They cannot stand up to me. *Killzone 3* is the greatest shooter ever made and laughs in the face of all those who think otherwise, but they're wrong all the same and broken as human beings. *Gran Turismo 5* is beyond the comprehension of those ill versed in the ways of Polyphony and unless you've played the game for 30 hours and achieved gold passes on all licences then you simply haven't been playing it properly.

These are facts. They can't be debated, but there are those who try. The answer, of course, is to scream louder than the rest, to always get the last word and to never surrender. The first glimpse of weakness you show them will be pounced upon and any faltering you see in them must be exploited. Oh, how you will laugh at their foolishness and make disparaging comments about their mothers.

I shall rejoice with every Xbox 360 game that is revealed to be coming to PS3 and bemoan and accuse of treachery all those who leave my beloved console to seek the filthy lucre of other console players. Above all it can be without question that all PlayStation exclusives are superior to their comparative competition on lesser platforms.

Such is the world of videogame conversation these days, where the weak crumble and the strong argue over the remaining scraps. Just be sure to get all of the things I've talked about done in the first 15 seconds of any game announcement otherwise you don't matter and are irrelevant to the videogame community. Consider this a wake-up call.



LIKING

The anticipation. There are lots of things to look forward to now in the world of PlayStation. As the year began we just had lots of great exclusives to enjoy and now we have revolutionary hardware to throw into the mix as well. I'm like a pig in, well, the stuff pigs spend a lot of time having fun in.

HATING

The fortune tellers. The PSP2 is doomed to fail. The PlayStation Phone is too little, too late. I'm sorry, I didn't realise you were a soothsayer. Could you possibly read my palm? Oh, you're not clairvoyant? In that case allow me to smack you in the mouth, as you don't seem able to keep it shut.

DISCLAIMER: The Fanboy is a PS3 enthusiast, but his views may never represent those of **Play** or its affiliates.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

ONE SHOT...ONE KILL

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The Vault

OBJECTS OF DESIRE

The toys, trinkets and tailoring that has our fires burning this month

Killzone and Deus Ex Books

£4.99 each at ForbiddenPlanet.co.uk

The quality of videogame books seems to be broadly on the rise just as they seem to be becoming more and more popular, which is excellent news. The latest to have a stab at this growing genre are *Killzone* and *Deus Ex*, both of which help fill in some gaps in the final games. Good stuff.

Crysis 2 Nanosuit Figure

£12.99 at ForbiddenPlanet.co.uk

Some may look at the Nanosuit from *Crysis 2* and see one of the most generic-looking lead character designs in the history of gaming. We see one of the most iconic. It may not have lots of bells and whistles, but it all serves a purpose. It's functional. That's all the better for good gameplay.

Dragon Quest Stacking Slime

£12.68 at Play-Asia.com

These things are actually trading items for *Dragon Quest* in Japan with a whole bunch of different sets you can buy and swap with friends. We, however, just like the look of this excellent pile of slimes so we think if we had them we would keep them to ourselves. It's not worth giving them away.

Kingdom Hearts Figures

£17.99 at Play.com

We thought we would carry on the *Kingdom Hearts* love this month, after featuring the Keyblade last issue, with these excellent Play Arts figures, made by Square Enix itself. Its toy line is always impressive and these figures are as good as they come. We particularly like the *Halloween Town* Sora.

Capcom Wall Decals

$49.99 at ThinkGeek.com

As if *Mega Man* wasn't difficult enough, pitting him against a whole host of his classic bosses seems a little mean. Thankfully they can't do him any harm here as these are just wall decals to decorate your room with. You can create your own dance of death for Mega Man in tribute to his greatness.

Simpsons on the Block

£19.99 at MySoti.com

There are occasions when design and concept come together in perfect harmony and this superb *Simpsons*-inspired shirt is a perfect example of this. Very cool indeed.

Spock Rock

£19.20 at MySoti.com

Spock does indeed rock, but not in a literal sense. This shirt says otherwise. Who are we to disagree with a shirt? That would be a silly argument.

MySoti
15% OFF
these great T-shirts
This Month's Code:
PlayGear203

CONDITIONS: Enter discount code when placing order. MySoti.com discount code only valid on featured items between 17 March and 13 April. Visit MySoti.com for even more great T-Shirts.

Star Wars Headphones

£34.99 each at Firebox.com

We like to keep a steady supply of *Star Wars* memorabilia running through The Vault if we can and these excellent headphones caught our eye this month. Could make a good accompaniment to the lamps we featured a couple of issues back. Anyway, these are pretty cool we think.

Naked Snake Figure

$50.99 at BigBadToyStore.com

Metal Gear fans love their merchandise as much as the next guy or gal, but they get a much higher calibre of tie-ins on the whole. Take for example this rather cute and funky figure of Naked Snake from *MGS 3*. It's got the innate cool of being a Snake figure and the added street cred as a vinyl statue.

Raving Rabbids UbiArt Figures

£4.99 at Play.com

These UbiArts figures have been floating around for a while now direct from Ubisoft and we're a bit disappointed not to have seen more over the last few years, but now they're spreading out to other sources. Like them or not you can't deny these Rabbids are pretty cool looking.

T-Virus And Anti-Virus Display

$171.99 at BigBadToyStore.com

With all the *Marvel Vs Capcom 3*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Super Street Fighter IV* love on the **Play** team we sometimes forget how much we adore *BlazBlue*, but thankfully there's now this excellent figure of Rachel Alucard to remind us of just how amazing a fighting game it is. Thanks for that guys.

Torgue Shirt

£20 at InsertCoinClothing.com

Torgue doesn't mess about in its advertising and neither does this shirt inspired by the fictional arms manufacturer in the superb open-world shooter *Borderlands*. Torgue makes its guns big, heavy and dark – exactly the kind of thing the roving wasteland bandit needs in the wilderness.

Nuka Cola Quantum Shirt

£20 at InsertCoinClothing.com

Nuka Cola is one thing, but wanderers of the Mojave know better than anyone that the true drink of champions is Quantum, the super-powered version of the old classic. Sure, it would make your urine glow when you went to the loo, but that's a small price to pay. Wear this shirt with pride.

HIGH FIVE

Not-so-piss-poor videogame movie Blu-rays

Street Fighter
1994

Okay, so this is pretty bad. But with so much time having gone by since it was made we can kind of laugh at *Street Fighter* now rather than cry. In fact, when you look at it you could compare it favourably with most of the action films of the Eighties.

Final Fantasy VII – Advent Children
2005

This Complete Edition of *Advent Children* caused quite a stir, in part thanks to a demo from *FFXIII*, but the HD visuals and new director's cut made a difference, too. Still a fan-only thing really.

Silent Hill
2006

In terms of look and atmosphere you couldn't have asked for a closer representation of *Silent Hill* from a movie. As such this is probably the best adaptation 'Hollywood' has ever produced.

DOA: Dead Or Alive
2006

Pretty much unanimously on **Play**, we consider this to be a real guilty pleasure. It's a rubbish movie, but it knows it and it has fun with it. In doing so it's actually quite faithful to the fighting series.

Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time
2010

Even though it had the game's creator on board and writing the script, *Prince Of Persia* still wasn't as good as we might have hoped. It wasn't terrible, though, and could lead to a good series of films in its own right.

PLAY
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Opinion, analysis and hilarity can be found in that order (or maybe not at all, ahem) over at **www.play-mag.co.uk**

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The **Play** team talks about games every month **www.play-mag.co.uk/category/podcasts**

Go to **www.Play-Mag.co.uk** for daily updates and features

Reload

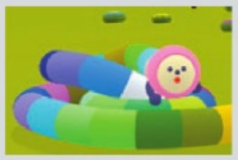
The very best of the Play Blog this month

@PLAYMAGIAN
Okay then, *3rd Birthday*, I see you've decided to include that "difficulty" thing I've heard so much about...

Videogame characters you shouldn't be picking a fight with

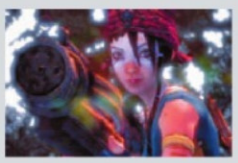
TALIM (SOUL CALIBUR SERIES) – She may seem timid, but her speed and those sharp blades make Talim deadly. The biggest issue though is having her stop long enough to hit her, which very rarely happens. The other issue? Lateral movement. For some reason hitting something in three dimensions is tricky.

SCOTT PILGRIM (SCOTT PILGRIM VS THE WORLD) – An unassuming geek bass player at first glance, Scott Pilgrim is actually a master fighter, legend of Toronto, hero of the downtrodden. His air juggle combos strike fear into the hearts of evil-exes everywhere and he does it all through the careful diet of energy drinks with just the right HP and XP increases.



NOBY NOBY BOY (NOBY NOBY BOY) – Cute and colourful, Noby Noby Boy is actually a killer in disguise. His long and malleable body makes him a crawling rope with which to strangle and crush you. Fall into his grasp and there may be no escape for you. He'll do whatever it takes for his girl.

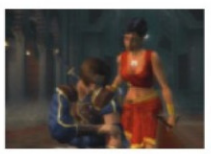
THE PRINCE (KATAMARI SERIES) – Probably the smallest of the characters in this, but the most powerful by far. Thanks to the Prince's katamari-rolling skills it is within his power to 'roll up' the entire solar system! Why would you risk that just to punch him in the face? You selfish so and so.



KAI (HEAVENLY SWORD) – Probably mad, certainly hyperactive, Kai seems like she needs a lot of protection and looking after. You might think you could pinch her lunch money with ease. Sorry to say that's simply not going to happen. Her fancy crossbow bazooka thing would have you pinned to a tree before you could even lift a finger.

http://bit.ly/e2v4JF

PlayStation's greatest romances... and what you can learn from them



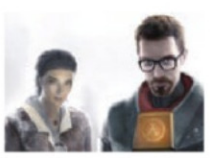
THE PRINCE & FARAH – Relationships can have tricky beginnings, but time spent together can be very revealing. Being in someone's company can reveal hidden depths. Such was the story of The Prince and Farah in *The Sands Of Time*.

Lesson to be learned: If you love someone you must let them go (by turning back time to save the world and having them forget you).

ICO & YORDA – The language of love is international and requires no translation. Ico and Yorda weren't exactly the most talkative pair, but a bond was formed. Now, relationships formed in moments of great stress can be tricky to maintain once the drama's gone, but these two seemed to have a future.

http://bit.ly/gezIIK

Lesson to be learned: Simple gestures can go a long way.



GORDON FREEMAN & ALYX VANCE – Age is no boundary to love as Freeman and Vance prove in *Half-Life 2*, something that you should already have worked out from Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones. Anyway, despite being old enough to be her father Alyx clearly falls for the strong and silent Freeman in a big bad way. Could it be the glasses?

Lesson to be learned: Actions (with a Gravity Gun) speak louder than words.

NATHAN DRAKE & ELENA FISHER – Opposites often attract for precisely the reason that their opposition actually makes them very similar. And so what was once false becomes truth, night becomes day and cottage cheese with pineapple chunks in becomes edible. Nathan and Elena may forever circle each other, but they keep getting closer.

Lesson to be learned: The possibility of death seems to be a real romance maker.

2011's oddest games – rated

> STACKING – Out this week on PSN and frankly very strange indeed. It involves playing as Russian dolls and 'stacking' them in order to use each of their unique special abilities. The art style has a kind of 19th Century thing going on and there's lots of fart humour. All in all perfectly kooky, but then we expect no less from the house of strange and wonderful that is Double Fine.
4/5

> CATHERINE – Playing as a rather feckless hero named Vincent you will traverse the world of the Japanese dating scene by day trying to balance your relationships with two women, while at night fighting off the nightmares of rams in bars and only wearing your underwear. We still don't entirely understand what Catherine is all about. We'd rather not know actually.
5/5

http://bit.ly/eDMK8Q

> EL SHADDAI: ASCENSION OF THE METATRON – With the world of man under threat of destruction by God you find seven fallen angels and uncover the plot that has deceived the lord into thinking humanity is not worth saving. The game takes liberally from the Book Of Enoch, but the plot isn't really the strange bit. What stands out is its extraordinary art style.
3/5

> TWISTED METAL – Clowns, psychopaths, monster truck drivers and homicidal maniacs... and that's just one gang. *Twisted Metal* is a loosely held together excuse for a bunch of beefed-up cars, bikes and vans to plough into one another with mounted machine guns and explosives. It's carnage on the strangest streets you've ever seen.
2/5

> YAKUZA: OF THE END – Having fought through the yakuza and survived three games of battling the intrigue and back-stabbing that such organisations are known for, you must now face your biggest challenges on the streets of Tokyo... Zombies. We're still having trouble getting our heads around how this has come about, but we'll go with it.
3/5

But what WAS cut from the PSP2?

It turns out Sony cut some features from the PSP2. This has shocked me – mainly because I thought it totally unfeasible for any more technology to be crammed into the device.

Anyway, we've done some digging and I think we've found a pretty definitive list of a few things Sony definitely cut from the PSP2. READ:

@PLAY MAGRYAN
Back from Sony party with two glowsticks, a hangover and a missing sock. Seriously. How do you lose a sock in a Holiday Inn room?

BUILT-IN HAMMOCK
We may have mentioned this before as a feature we wanted to see, but our spies revealed that – at some point in the PSP2's development – it had an insta-hammock available at the press of a button.

23 ANALOGUE STICKS
People wanted two with the PSP, they got one. They complained. Sony wanted to redress the balance in a way that would mean nobody would complain about a lack of thumbsticks again. It took it a step too far, it seems.

3D
Why bother?

Yeah, that's about it. I trust our Sony spy implicitly, so you can take all of these claims as cast-iron fact.

http://bit.ly/hjSSG

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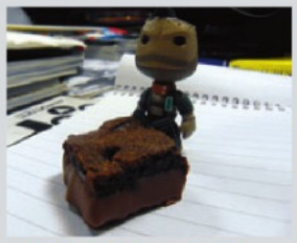
Things you may have missed on our Facebook page



SACKBOY SEV LIKES BROWNIES ^_^

DLC COSTUMES FOR MVC3 ANNOUNCED: CHECK OUT SF1 RYU!

THE MAKING OF PLAY 202'S BACKPAGE

YOUR SAY

Ask us anything... just about

Which serial killer are you most scared of? – tedcurly
Ian Dransfield. He's killed literally thousands. I'm terrified that I'm next... – PlayMagChris

Why would anyone read a videogame novel? It's like watching porn for the storyline and acting. – hazy89
In the modern era of gaming, videogame worlds are deeper and richer than ever before. You only have to spend a short amount of time in a world like Rapture or *Mass Effect*'s Citadel to realise that there's a lot of stories that could be told beyond the world of the game itself – Jon@Play

Should the *SOTC* HD remake have had the extra content included that was missing from the first version? – kev schmit
I think the original got it about right. It's worth remembering that Team Ico didn't develop this remake – Jon@Play

How long could you go without gaming? – rbl007
I've gone for weeks without playing games before... – Ian@Play

@PLAY MAGCHRIS
Attempting to edit a John Carmack interview into manageable, word-count-friendly, bite-sized chunks is a near impossible task.

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Things you may have missed on our YouTube channel

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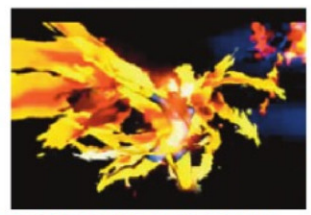
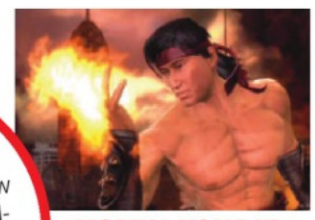


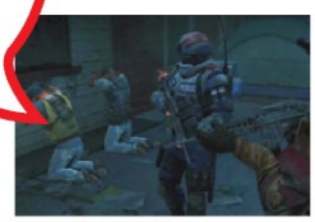
MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3 – PLAY VS NOWGAMER

ANARCHY REIGNS – TRAILER



MORTAL KOMBAT – LIU KANG TRAILER

RIDGE RACER UNBOUND



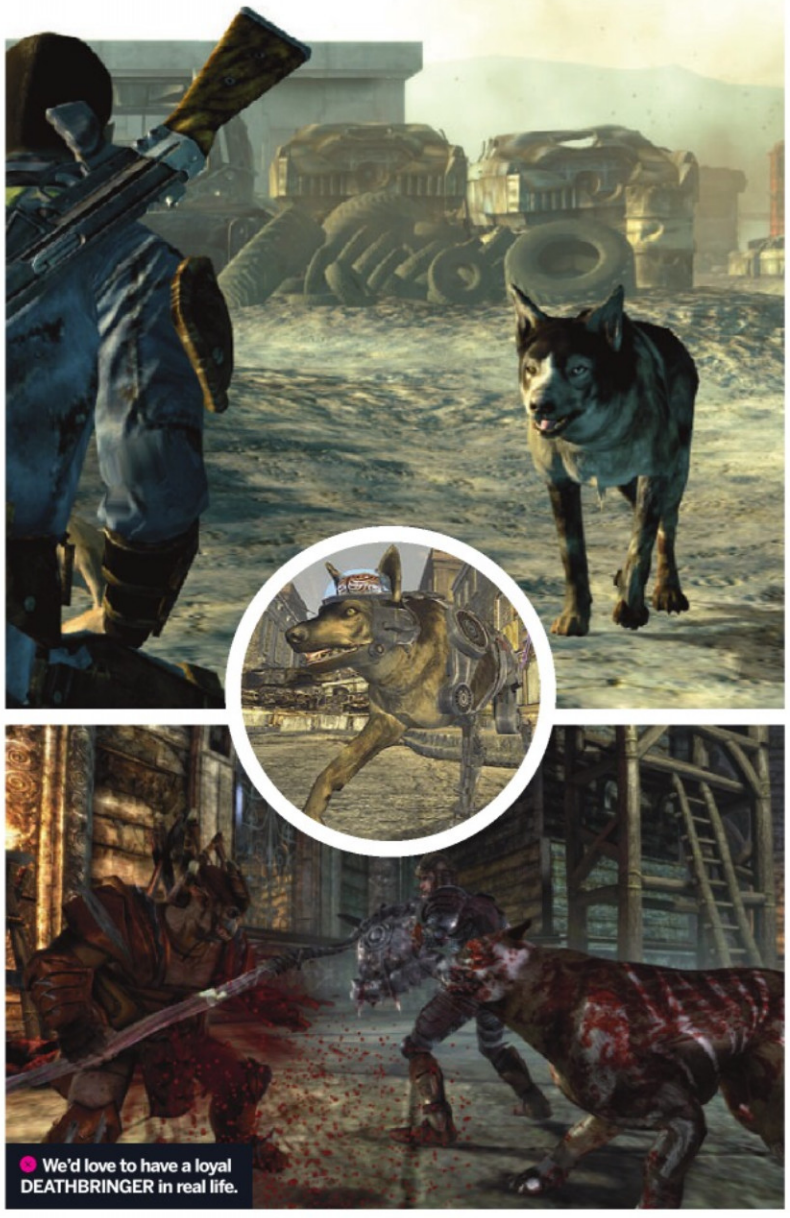
HOMEFRONT – SINGLE-PLAYER

CRYSIS 2 – STORY TRAILER

PLAY ♥ POOCHES

There's one thing everyone in the world can agree on: dogs are brilliant. As such, we've had countless examples of canine companions making our gaming experiences that much better over the years. We love you, mutts

"See? We even put dogs on our front cover."


We'd love to have a loyal DEATHBRINGER in real life.

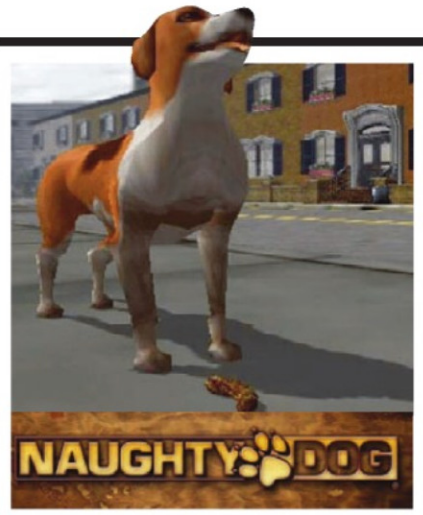
1. [Dog] Loyalty

There's one thing to be said for a sidekick who helps out, shoots baddies and quips along with you. But it's another thing altogether when a pooch helps you out. That primal surge of respect you feel for the animal when Dogmeat returns with some ammo, or Dog from *Dragon Age* licks the blood from your armour is something truly special, and an element that no amount of cats could ever replicate. Stupid cats. We're still awaiting a game that allows co-operative play, one player taking control of the protagonist and the other playing as his trusty canine DEATHBRINGER. They wouldn't have to be called DEATHBRINGER, we just like the idea of the mutt being a DEATHBRINGER, like a career choice.

You couldn't do this with a cat.

2. [Dog] FURY

Dogs are, unless you didn't know, animals. Animals are capable of many things, but weighing up the consequences of a rash action on their part isn't one of them – hard as that may be to believe. As such, when a dog loses it, it can be frightening (covered later) or it can be *furious and brilliant*, which is obviously the preferable option of the two. When Rinoa's pooch Angelo becomes a cannon in *Final Fantasy VIII* – that was fury… in a way. *Okami*'s near-pooch Amaterasu unleashed the wolfish (almost dogish) fury in a totally unique way, painting her furious fury everywhere. Furiously. Then, of course, there's Shadow from *Dead To Rights*. He takes his rage out in a… well, he… sigh. Those poor, poor testicles.



3. [Dog] Tricks

While it may not be your traditional 'trick' taught by rip-off dog schools across the world, we can't help but feel Jake from the PS2's *Dog's Life* and his ability to collect smells should be lauded for all it is. He literally collects smells. Brilliant. Our dogs can't/couldn't do that, even if they tried. And they do. We could also throw this one in, but then it might become apparent that we're running out of ideas for this point. Oh well. Some of the best tricks ever pulled off by a dog have been those by Naughty Dog. The graphical trickery they're known for does make Nathan Drake and co look a lot better than we might ever have hoped for. Good boy(s and girl)!

We still have nightmares about *Resi*'s zombie dogs.

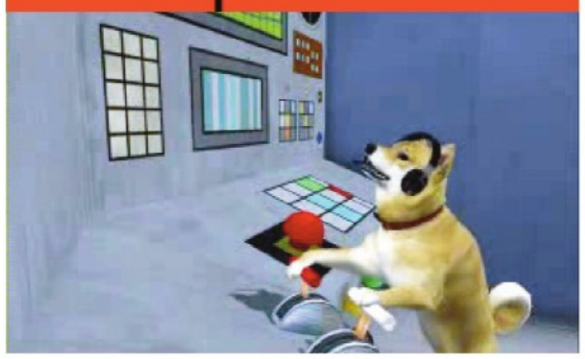
4. (Dog) Fear

You have to remember that, of course, dogs aren't always on your side. Sometimes they're just gits, out to hurt you or terrify you in some way. And yet we still love them for it. Sure, the zombie dogs of *Resident Evil* made us have to change our underwear every time they jumped through those windows, but we respected them for it. And yes, the first fight against the Dog in *Enslaved* had us worried we'd never be able to overcome it, but we didn't admire the fine robo-beast any less. And what about when you're on the receiving end of fear? Well that's when man's best friend comes to the rescue. See: Haunting Ground, Rule Of Rose and Resident Evil 4 for proof.

Sam was bloody hilarious at times. Although his non-dog sidekick Max was probably funnier.

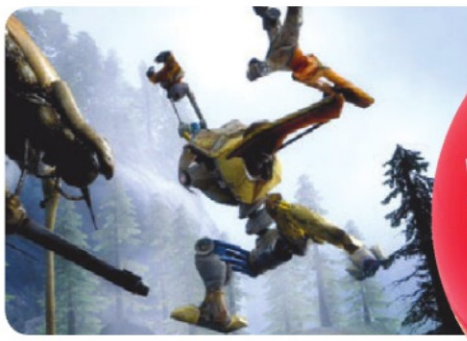
6. (Dog) Hilarity

Everyone knows dogs are capable of being at least as funny as your bog-standard, everyday clown. It's just nature's way. Who didn't laugh at the thought of a rapping dog in a beanie really needing a shit? Oh, PaRappa. And while he might not always hit the high watermark of his... rabbit... thing... friend Max, Sam can often raise a wry grin in all but the most humourless of folks. Though, to be fair, it's not like either Sam or PaRappa are acting anything like their real-life counterparts. Nor is Mira, the dog from *Silent Hill 2*'s super-secret ending, acting like any of our dogs ever have done before. They can't operate levers, for one. This point needs re-thinking...



5. (Dog) Rescue

Otherwise known as 'the Lassie effect', dogs are often known in real life to be rescuers, helpers and aiders. They may be subservient most of the time, but when they need to be they can step up to the plate and eff ess up. See: *Rule Of Rose* or *Haunting Ground* for examples of the heroics of those (grown up) puppies.



BEST DOG EVER

In the end it wasn't even a difficult decision – the best dog that's ever dogged their doggy way through a game (with a dog in it) is Dog from *Half-Life 2*. Seriously. He throws a car through a wall *with you in it*. Also he plays fetch. Ah, Dog – you're brilliant.

CONCLUSION

There's not much of a conclusion to be made here, beyond the fact that dogs are fantastic. They help, they hinder, they amuse, they sadden, they wag, they slobber and they've been involved in all manner of great gaming treats over the years. Plus without them we wouldn't have been able to make that utterly awful pun about Naughty Dog being one of the best dogs on PlayStation. Pooches around the world: **Play** loves you.

5 SO BAD, THEY'RE GOOD

Because not every game gets to be a Killzone or a LittleBigPlanet. No, some of them have to be content being a...

1 STRANGLEHOLD

The mirror image of the Hong Kong action films it imitates. You've heard about the millions of dollars poured into it but somehow, the end result is a rough and ready mess of explosions, awful music and men diving about in slow motion. Have no expectations and you'll have fun.

2 WHEELMAN

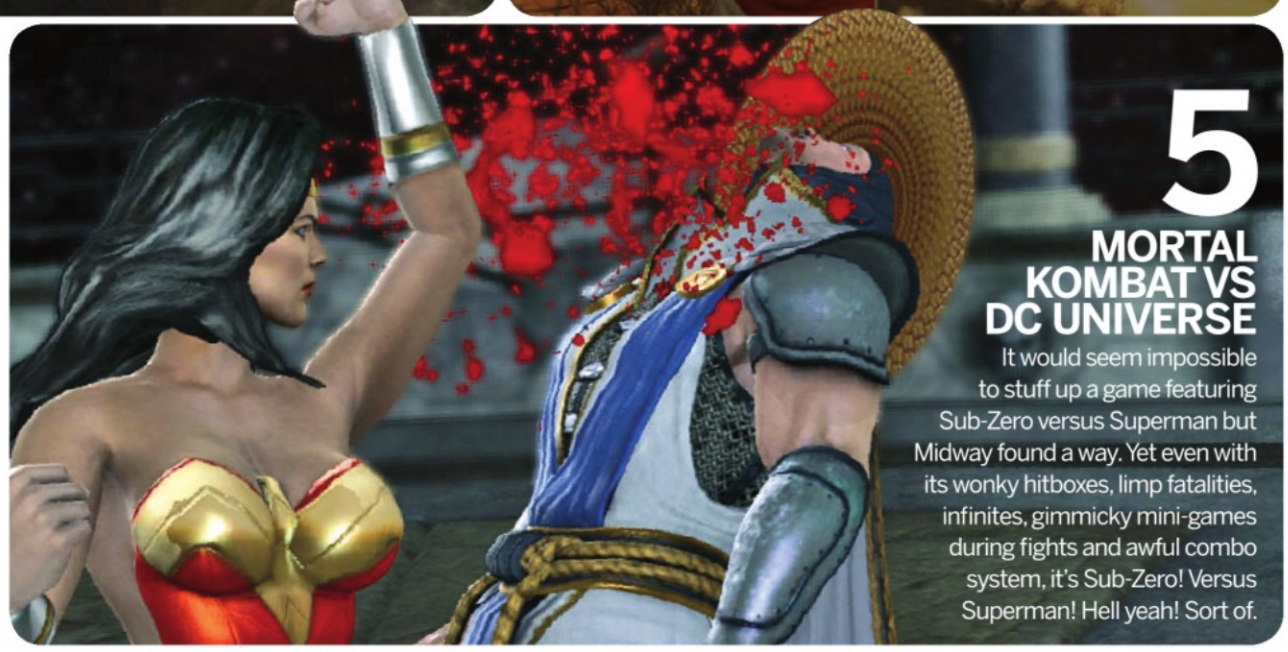
Troubled development, Vin Diesel, Midway... there was almost no chance *Wheelman* could have survived to be enjoyable. And yet it was! Not because it was gaming par excellence but because it was a little bit grubby, it was a little bit cheeky and it was a little bit ridiculous.

3 50 CENT: BLOOD ON THE SAND

Maybe it's the swear button. Maybe it's the storyline that has you chasing a crystal skull. Maybe it's classic lines like the family favourite "**** this ****ing ****". Or maybe it's that *Blood On The Sand* is a surprisingly competent high-score shooter? Nah.

4 HAZE

Remember your promise to Merino! Remember your promise to Merino! This day, we will be the victors! Remember your promise to Merino! Remember your promise to... MY GOD SHUT UP. Did Free Radical do this deliberately? Is this a parody? We still don't know.



5 MORTAL KOMBAT VS DC UNIVERSE

It would seem impossible to stuff up a game featuring Sub-Zero versus Superman but Midway found a way. Yet even with its wonky hitboxes, limp fatalities, infinites, gimmicky mini-games during fights and awful combo system, it's Sub-Zero! Versus Superman! Hell yeah! Sort of.

TEAM PICKS

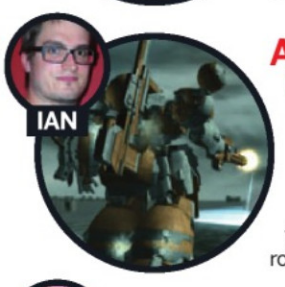
The Play team reveal their dirty gaming secrets

ASSASSIN'S CREED

Everyone disliked the first *Assassin's Creed*. Only a fool would say it wasn't repetitive, but it was also fluid and fun, and the cities were beautifully re-created.

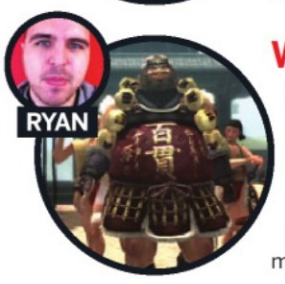
CONAN

Conan was a real guilty pleasure for me. The gameplay was clunky, the visuals grainy and the plot idiotic, but it was fun. Nothing you can say will convince me it wasn't cool.



ARMORED CORE

I have a place in my heart for the *Armored Core* series. Nobody seems to like them, even though they're giant stompy robots. Me(n)tal.



WAY OF THE SAMURAI 3

Yeah, it sucks. And I should know better. But there's something fun about slaughtering an entire game full of samurai using nothing more than a leek.

www.imagineshop.co.uk

The anatomy of...

Isaac Clarke

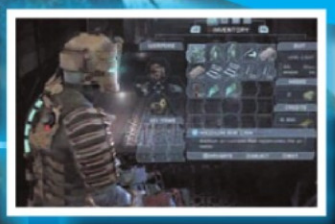
Now that he's flipped back his helmet and given his vocal chords a go we know there's more to Isaac Clarke than simply amputating things

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

Isaac Clarke's head. Now there's a jumbled cranium packed to the brim with psychoses, trauma and more mental disorders than Patrick Bateman. We imagine Sigmund Freud would have a field day with this one. *Holding up a Rorschach test* "So, what does this look like to you, Isaac?" "It looks like my dead girlfriend with a mouth coming out of her neck and spikes growing from her elbows." "...Riiiiiight."

ISAAC'S FACADE

We never got to see Isaac's features in the first *Dead Space*. He was a quiet chap, happily doing everyone else's business without so much as a groan or an objection. In the second game he doffs his fancy hat/space helmet all the time, revealing that underneath he's... wait for it... an utterly generic man without anything interesting to say for himself. He doesn't even seem too bothered that there's been a *second* Necromorph outbreak, even going so far as to make a funny quip about how good he is at killing Necromorphs. If it were us we'd be crying in the corner clawing 'HELP ME' into our own faces.



MONITORING EVENTS

What's this thing that Isaac always has sticking out of his chest? A Kindle holder? We've always suspected that the text scrolling down it is a copy of *The Snail And The Whale*. More likely it's the thingamabob that projects Isaac's inventory screen, which is one of *Dead Space*'s greatest ideas. *Dead Space*'s inventory doesn't offer a respite from the terror because it doesn't pause the game, meaning you're still vulnerable when organising your kit. Also, like the energy bar on Isaac's RIG, the in-world inventory ensures the player stays immersed in Visceral's terrifying environments by not interrupting the atmosphere with videogame clichés.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Yes, it's the 211-V Plasma Cutter, a high-energy mineral slicer that's also pretty good at shooting off legs. Using tools as weapons was an inspired idea, but we're not convinced by the practical applications of most of them. The Line Gun seems like a pretty hazardous way of cutting ore to us. Imagine it; "Ayup lads. See that rock theear? We'ar goan shoot it apart wi' lasers! Get crackin!" And what about the Ripper? Maybe it's just us, but swinging around a *floating* diamond-coated blade seems like a pretty good way to have someone's intestines out.

THE MANY DEATHS OF ISAAC CLARKE

This may look like some kind of dodgy Japanese hentai, but you'll be relieved to learn that it's actually just our hero Isaac getting a Necromorph tail/tentacle/spike/thing forced down his throat. That's far less disturbing, we're sure you'll agree.

Isaac has been turned into a Necromorph here, with a big dangly neck. The process begins with him being decapitated, then a little wriggly head forces its floppy entrails down his neck. *Dead Space* is actually rather horrible, isn't it?

Come on Isaac. That's just embarrassing. Death by adult Necromorph is fine, but when an undead child manages to hack your arms off it's a little humiliating. While we're on the topic, what's up with all the dead children, Visceral?

Here we see Isaac is getting his face vomited off. Following this, Isaac then vomits up quite a bit himself. It's like a big vomit party. Are we even allowed to say 'big vomit party' in the magazine? Let's see if the editor leaves it in.

Isaac's gone and done a blunder. In failing to close this emergency shutter in time he's only gone and caused it to slam shut on his own torso. It's a persistent bugger, though, and continuously smashes into Isaac until he's cut in half.

Now that's just silly, isn't it, Isaac. You're on a ship festering with Necromorphs, Tiedemann's army, and the delusions of your own fractured mind, and you've gone and got yourself decapitated by a *fan*. Well done. Idiot.

AND FINALLY...

Where hype and hyperbole are welcome

stop please

Natural porn killer

THEY SAY: In an attempt to drum up interest in Japan for *Killzone 3* Sony has hired a Japanese porn star as their representative of the Helghast in a promotional campaign.
WE SAY: If you were trying to promote a Western FPS in Japan you'd probably wheel out a porn actress, too.

PS3 pulled?

THEY SAY: In an ongoing patent infringement case between LG and Sony, the former has asked courts to order all PS3s to be taken from shelves. What on Earth will we do?
WE SAY: This is fairly standard in such cases and no matter what the outcome is, it usually doesn't result in successful products being pulled.

Panama panic

THEY SAY: All videogames containing any content that could be considered violent will be banned in Panama meaning that even *LittleBigPlanet 2* would be illegal.
WE SAY: Not happening (we hope), as this was proposed by a single Panamanian politician. Last we heard it's not going to be considered by the Panama government.

UNCHARTED CASTING CHATTER CONTINUES

Drake said it best himself; "Oh crap"

THEY SAY: As likely *Uncharted* movie director David O Russell went around the world promoting his Oscar-approved and critically acclaimed boxing movie, *The Fighter*, he was met again and again with queries about his upcoming videogame adaptation. Speaking with *Empire*, Russell suggested that Scarlett Johansson is a contender for the role of Elena Fisher in the film. Beyond that Mark Wahlberg, Russell's leading man in *The Fighter*, is still assumed to be filling the half-tucked shirt of Nathan Drake with Robert De Niro playing some other, unknown character.

WE SAY: The *Uncharted* movie bandwagon is rolling hard and strong and shows no signs of stopping until the movie is canned or released. As such you can expect to see lots of stories based on the loosest possible quotes from everyone involved or rumoured to be involved in this adaptation. Russell didn't name Johansson as cast in the film. He just said he really liked her when asked about casting the character of Elena. Having said that he does also keep repeating his interest in making *Uncharted* a movie about, "a crime family that metes out justice in the world of art and antiquities," as he told IGN recently. Sounds like an interesting idea... doesn't sound like *Uncharted*, though.

WARNING! THIS WARNING IS GRATUITOUS AND SERVES NO PURPOSE

FOX CAUSES A STORM

Bulletstorm controversy erupts from Fox article

THEY SAY: In the run-up to the release of *Bulletstorm*, Fox News caused a wave of controversy with an article entitled, 'Is *Bulletstorm* the worst videogame in the world?' However, it was not the article's title so much as comments by experts contacted by Fox that created a storm. "The increase in rapes can be attributed in large part to the playing out of [sexual] scenes in videogames," psychiatrist Carole Lieberman told the news network.

WE SAY: It's pretty easy to see why people got so upset by the statements of psychiatrist Carole Lieberman, author of such helpful books as *Bad Boys: Why We Love Them, How To Live With Them, And When To Leave Them*. That may actually say it all really. Anyway, we've all been here before right? Isn't it about time we started laughing some of this nonsense off rather than getting so wound up by it?

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THE DESERT SESSION

Turns out Nathan Drake is making his third appearance on PS3 this year. As such, we felt it our duty to pepper Richard Lemarchand, co-lead game designer on Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception, with as many questions as his brain could cope with. The enlightening results follow

Nathan Drake has made it – he's arguably the main face of the PS3; the closest thing Sony has to a mascot. Apart from the little sack-bloke, but we're going to ignore him for now. We've seen a good game and a truly great game starring Nate, and now we're waiting for the third in the series. The truly difficult entry. The one where expectations are so high we could just be setting ourselves up for a fall of truly epic proportions. But if any developer can get it right, it's Naughty Dog – and after our chat with co-lead game designer Richard Lemarchand, we're positively beaming with confidence about *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*.

But where do you start? Considering the hype already surrounding *Drake's Deception*, we'd expect some kind of pyrotechnic-infused presentation on a par with the most theatrical and bombastic of all events (with a metal soundtrack, naturally) to reveal the game to the company and the rest of the world. Apparently, though, this isn't the case. "We start every project we work on with a briefly stated design goal, which we refer back to throughout development to make sure we're staying on track with our original ideas," Lemarchand revealed. "This time around, we wanted to send Drake on an adventure where we could find out more about his character and his background, and we decided early on that exploring his relationship with his friend and mentor, Victor Sullivan, would be a great way to do that."

So where is *Drake's Deception* set? Even though we've actually been told locations, whereabouts and are probably about to be sent fully annotated maps covering every aspect, we're still unsure. And it's not just us. Everyone in the world is unsure as to precise locations, seeing as Drake and co have the 650,000-square kilometres of the Rub' al Khali desert to comb through in the search for Iram of the Pillars (also known as Ubar, among other names).

IF ANY DEV CAN GET IT RIGHT, IT'S NAUGHTY DOG

That's quite hard to narrow down, truth be told. But why? Lemarchand explained: "As we do with every *Uncharted* game, we wanted to explore aspects of a real-life historical mystery that would pass the 'Google test' – that if you looked it up on the internet, you'd find something real to support our fictional world." He went on: "During her early research, our creative director Amy Hennig stumbled across the story of the lost city of Ubar, the fabled 'Atlantis of the Sands'. Ubar was a once-prosperous trading city on the Arabian Peninsula which mysteriously vanished into the vast, empty spaces of the desert known as the 'Empty Quarter'."

But sand will surely be difficult to get right? Though, to be fair, this is Naughty Dog – the company that gave us The Greatest Snow In The History Of Games. And doesn't it know it: "We do like to set big graphical and technical challenges for ourselves. We've done it with each of the games in the *Uncharted* series – we decided to tackle water and jungle for *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, and snow and ice in *Uncharted 2*."

This time around we have sand and fire, but aren't they just boring, background elements? No. Let Mr Lemarchand inform you: "We knew that sand and fire would push us in new graphical directions that people hadn't necessarily seen much of before. It's so difficult to do fire well in videogames, and sand that behaves realistically is probably even harder. They're both great elements to focus on, though, because they're so 'grounding'. Everyone knows what sand and fire look like, so if we pull off their look really well, that automatically helps you to believe in the reality of Nathan Drake's world." He added, just to prove the devs are actually human in some respects: "We're not fearless, though – far from it. In fact, we spend quite >

Naughty Dog isn't skimping on the hints as to what *Drake's Deception* could entail.

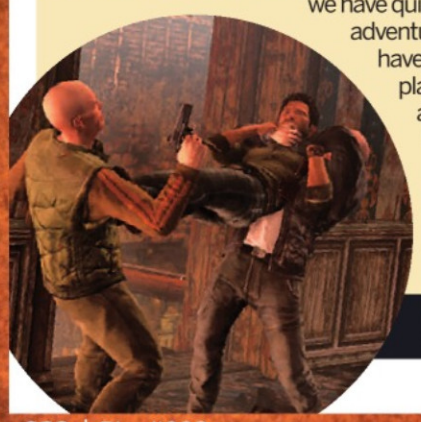
It's a silly thing to get excited about, but this could be the best sand ever.

It's safe to assume the airship crash is an "oh crap!" moment.

UNCHARTED: CALL OF BATTLEFIELD

We still don't need it – we're still happy to take it

We never really expected multiplayer in *Uncharted 2* to be any good. But it was. So it's no surprise to hear it's coming back in *Drake's Deception*, as Lemarchand stated: "We were really happy with what we were able to achieve with *Uncharted 2*'s multiplayer game, given that we were almost beginning from scratch... It's a big goal of ours with *Uncharted 3* to become a major contender for the online multiplayer crown and we have quite a few surprises up our online-adventuring sleeves. The relationship we have with our community of online players is very important to us, and we can't wait to see what they think of the multiplayer in *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*! Hopefully, they'll tell all their friends to join in the fun!"



Combat is improved over *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves*.

a lot of our lives in a pretty advanced state of fear and anxiety – especially when we're trying to get something ready to show to the public. It's probably that fear that helps keep us on our toes, and push ourselves further in terms of quality."

While Nate is traipsing around desert (and other) locales, he'll be behaving in exactly the same way as before, right? *Right*? Wrong. *Drake's Deception* isn't just going to be a tarted-up version of the last game – Lemarchand informed us the development team will be introducing more than just better-rendered half-tucks: "We introduced a system in *Uncharted 2*, our foreground object traversal system, that lets Drake, his allies and all the opponents use all their moves on any moving object in the world. However, we couldn't use that system with dynamic physics objects, which is something that we've remedied for *Uncharted 3*. Traversable physics objects open up a lot of game design opportunities for us, and I can't wait to tell people more about what we have in store." He couldn't wait so much that he immediately told us this, too: "Also, though we did expand the melee combat for *Uncharted 2*, we couldn't expand it as much as we wanted. We've taken the hand-to-hand fighting in *Drake's Deception* a lot further, including a system for fighting multiple enemies at the same time, and a bunch of new stealth moves. And that's just the tip of the iceberg!"

WE'VE TAKEN THE HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING A LOT FURTHER

Giving Drake the moves to make the game play well is one thing, but keeping everything within the established characteristics of the adventuring wise-cracker is another thing altogether: "We've always had a strong idea of what kind of person Nate is, and that has been the most important thing in helping us plan his adventures. He's a regular guy with a great historical imagination; he's largely self-taught and is a student of the school of hard knocks." Which means? "As a result, he's a fast, loose fighter, and is far from the agile powerhouse of military training that forms the template

You can just about *feel* the wisecracks oozing out of it already.

Sully: it's perfectly reasonable to have a man-crush on him.

The original Nathan Drake? No, probably not.

for many videogame characters. He's pretty self-interested but loyal to his friends, most of the time at least. He has quite a lot of faith and hope, but, just like all of us, he has some self-doubt and a few other weaknesses."

With this new emphasis on deeper combat, does it mean we'll be having a more punchy adventure, more akin to Indiana Jones than Lara Croft? Not necessarily, according to Lemarchand: "We're always searching to find the right balance and combination of gameplay elements in the *Uncharted* games, and we try to plan the overall arc of the single-player game very carefully. We always want to keep the player on their toes, and we don't ever want the game to feel like it has become repetitive or predictable. That means constantly switching things up, combining different elements in different patterns across the course of the game." He added: "So, just as in *Uncharted 2*, if you took a random section of the game you might find that it has a very intense sequence of gunplay, or little to none at all. You can expect us to keep trying to buck any kind of trend towards repetition in *Uncharted 3* – but this time with more big, sloppy brawls in the mix." 'Sloppy brawls' – we're not sure if that sounds delicious, sexy or just *terrifying*.

Let's just segue a little right now to take in the glory that is Victor 'Sully' Sullivan. What with his taste for cigars and ladies of the night it's impossible for us not to love the man, so it's good to know he'll be something of a focal point in ***Drake's Deception***. "We know that Sullivan is a great favourite among *Uncharted* fans, and he's a favourite of ours, as well. We spent a long time talking about him and his character when we were working on *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, and he's an important 'emotional satellite' for Nate; we use the other characters in the game to reflect aspects of Nate's character, without pointing at them too directly." Lemarchand went on: "Sullivan is terrific for doing this – he's obviously a great adventurer in the Ernest Hemingway vein. He's been everywhere, he's seen it all, and he's done everything. He can handle himself in a fight, and has made a significant score or three in the treasure-hunting stakes. However, he's also lost as much as he's won over the years, and now that he's later in his life, the >

DRAKE OF ARABIA

Wear your influences proudly

Influences can be a powerful thing, and can push titles one way or the other on the awesome-o-meter. Fortunately, Drake's adventures have always strayed on the good side of 'paying homage' to Lucasfilm's finest archaeologist. This time around, though, *Lawrence Of Arabia* makes its presence felt – and with good cause, according to Lemarchand: "David Lean, the director of *Lawrence Of Arabia*, was a groundbreaking and visionary filmmaker, and was very much ahead of his time... Romance – with a small 'r' indicating adventure, imagination and passion – is very much a part of the make-up of the *Uncharted* series. We draw heavily from the whole history of pulp adventure for inspiration when we're coming up with each *Uncharted* game, and we couldn't have wanted for a better touchstone than David Lean's film. However, the desert is just one part of a story which leads Nathan Drake to many different locations around the world, including the ruined French chateau that we showed at our recent press event, and some other locations that we hinted at in our announcement trailer."

People in puffy, sleeveless jackets probably deserve to be punched.

WE'RE WORKING PROBABLY HARDER THAN WE'VE EVER DONE

independent path that Sullivan has always been on is perhaps starting to look like a lonely one." But fear not – he's not just in the game to be the personification of Drake's possible lonely future: "Beyond all this, we all love Sully because he's always ready with a genuinely funny wisecrack, and he's a good person to have in your corner when shit goes down."

Anyway, back to matters outside of cigar-chomping, moustachioed vagabonds. We shouldn't forget that the *Uncharted* series is one of many characters we've come to know and love, even if the English guys are always the baddies. Naughty Dog makes sure to work hard on each and every person (and weird mutant thing) they include in the series, and – shock of all shocks – things aren't about to change for *Drake's Deception*. "We've worked hard on our cast of supporting characters. It's funny to think that, just a few short years ago, no-one knew anything about the world of *Uncharted*," Lemarchand told us. We asked him how important it was to keep the core character list as minimal as possible, to which he gave us these words: "I don't know that we're particularly concerned with minimalism in our *Uncharted* storytelling. The number of special-case environments and enormously complex set pieces we saddle ourselves with would certainly make you think otherwise! However, our storytelling style is definitely concise and compact, and we hate to waste one single opportunity to shed new light on a character or situation." He went on: "We're very concerned with character-driven storytelling, and an important aspect of that is making sure that all of the characters in the game are well-rounded and sufficiently deep to help people suspend their disbelief in the fictional world we're creating. One shallow character can easily destroy the sense of believability of the world. By maximising what we have to work with, we can get our characters to do the story justice, showing our hero Nathan Drake as he, along with our audience of players, goes through the emotional twists and turns of the adventure." But is Drake all-important? Could the game and story thrive with any old faceless, bald space marine at the helm? "Establishing who Drake is for ourselves has taken us a long way in creating believable and compelling narratives that will hold player's attention, no matter what we throw at him. Without this kind of solid foundation, it wouldn't really matter how much we did or didn't plan ahead." Apparently not.

While we may be obsessing with this '*Uncharted 3*' thing, it's easy to forget that Naughty Dog is giving the series legs outside of the gaming world. As Lemarchand pointed out: "Having worked for so long and so hard to create the world and characters of *Uncharted*,

One thing we know: never trust stairs.

The fire might be on a par with the sand. Trust us – that makes sense.

we're very excited about extending the universe into other storytelling forms! I can't talk about many of our plans yet, but we've been talking with David O Russell about his ideas for the film. We're big fans of his work, and we can't wait to see how he brings his personal and very distinctive touch to the world of Nathan Drake." So that's definitely *one* person excited about seeing Mark Wahlberg strut his stuff. But wait, there's more: "We're also very excited about *Uncharted: The Fourth Labyrinth*, which is a novel by Christopher Golden, and which will be a completely original Nathan Drake adventure. It's scheduled to be published by Del Rey Books in the autumn of 2011. We're really excited about this – we've been fans of Chris Golden since reading the *Hellboy* original novels that he's famous for, and we know that the very high quality of storytelling that he'll bring to the *Uncharted* universe is going to do us proud." Safe to say, those of you craving more from Nate's adventures are sure to have something to turn to once you've got bored of the games. Not that that will happen any time soon, but still – it's nice to know they're there.

It's impossible to be anything but hopeful when it comes to a new *Uncharted* game. After all, the second was one of the best games on anything, never mind just PS3. But Lemarchand managed to make us go beyond hopeful and into a dangerous realm – one of confidence. How? Simple: "We wanted to sink our teeth into something that we hadn't done before. We always want to bring something new to players of our games, and so we're working probably harder than we've ever done to exceed people's expectations." If that doesn't make you confident *Drake's Deception* will be fantastic, nothing will. And if you're not hopeful, excited *or* confident, and you actually hate Nathan Drake and all of his adventures… well, you're probably out of luck: "We've always said that we'll keep making *Uncharted* games for as long as people want to play them, so I don't think we have any preconceptions about how many adventures Nathan Drake will have! We hope he's a strong enough character to support a good number of adventures, and we feel like the colourful, exciting world he lives in has a lot of potential." Here's to *Uncharted 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 34, 258…*

ADVENTURE TOGETHER, GET TREASURE TOGETHER

But will anyone be able to agree on a 50/50 split?

The topic of co-operative play is one that will pop up in many conversations about *Uncharted 3*. That is many conversations in our office, at least – we can't be sure what you people in the Outside talk about. Anyway, thirsty for more delicious, life-giving knowledge we asked Lemarchand about the possibilities for co-op making a bigger splash in *Drake's Deception* than it did in *Among Thieves*. The answer we received was enlightening, and we felt it necessary to quote here, separately, in full to give it the real space it deserves to have full impact: " ". Yes, folks – nothing. Guess we'll just have to wait and see what pops up in this respect.

PSP2: THE BIG QUESTIONS ANSWERED

WHETHER YOU CALL IT PSP2 OR NGP, HERE'S ALL THE INFORMATION YOU NEED!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PSP?

Sony hasn't yet revealed what its plans will be for PSP once PSP2 hits the market and there's no clear prediction for what will happen. While PSP's survival is likely to depend on the level of support from publishers and developers, it's worth noting that it continues to sell well in Japan, thanks to the success of *Monster Hunter*. It remains a hotbed of development for Japanese studios and that will likely continue for a while after PSP2's release, even if the US and European markets for PSP are stagnating. Still, given PSPgo emphasised downloadable PSP titles, which will be compatible for PSP2, the signs point towards Sony throwing its weight behind the newer handheld sooner rather than later.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR PLAYSTATION 3?

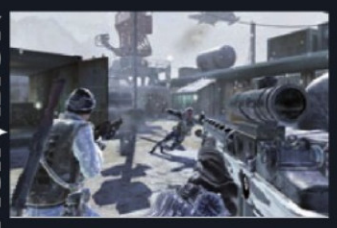
There won't be any direct effect on PS3 but PSP2's release will influence it in subtle ways. We already know that PSP titles, minis and PSone classics will work on PSP2, so expect them to get big promotions and price cuts to coincide with its release. Likewise, expect the library to be bolstered somewhat, hopefully with PS Store getting more universal content across all regions rather than segregated releases. There are rumours of a price cut for PS3, as Sony looks to strengthen its PlayStation 3 brand and user base. Finally, although it's unlikely to change, the new PSP2 interface could have a knock-on effect and see Sony try new ideas with its XMB interface for PS3. We'll just have to wait and see.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT GAMES?

Monster Hunter proved the most popular title on PSP by a long way, so a sequel of some sorts is inevitable on PSP2. However, this won't necessarily guarantee its success. While it's easy to suggest *Uncharted* and *Killzone* will be prominent titles in the PSP2 line-up, and they obviously will be prominent, it's actually fresh IP that helps power portable systems. Think *Monster Hunter* for PSP, *Professor Layton* for DS, *Angry Birds* for iPhone and so on. So if PSP2 is to become a big success, its breakout title will be an unexpected one and not necessarily from one of the powerhouse developers such as Sony or Capcom. With the touch-screen sensors, anything is possible...

WHO WILL BE WORKING ON PSP2?

ACTIVISION



Likely titles: Call Of Duty, Tony Hawk

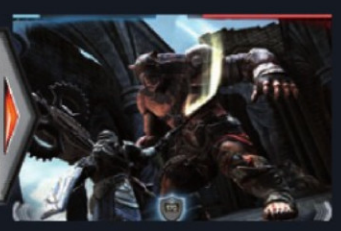
NOW THAT ACTIVISION has canned *Guitar Hero*, it looks surprisingly light on IP when you look past its *Call Of Duty* behemoth. Still, with the likes of *Crash* and *Spyro* on its books, expect to see a few familiar faces resurfacing on Sony's handheld. Our bet? Given its long history of PSP titles and push for innovative control schemes, look for one last throw of the *Tony Hawk* dice on the platform.

CAPCOM

Likely titles: Monster Hunter, SFIV

PSP HAS OFTEN been referred to as the *Monster Hunter* machine, based on the success of Capcom's action-MMO grind for Sony's portable system in Japan. It's impossible to imagine PSP2 without a *Monster Hunter* iteration, even if you try really hard (go on, give it a shot) and given Capcom is also brewing up a *Street Fighter IV* for Nintendo 3DS, expect the same treatment for NGP.

EPIC GAMES



Likely titles: Bulletstorm, Infinity Blade

CLIFF BLESZINSKI HAS offered only the vaguest of hints that *Bulletstorm* would be coming to PSP2 – turn the page for the exact quote – while *Infinity Blade* would perhaps be too unusual a project to take from iPad to PSP2. Epic is big on new IP though, so look for something along those lines as the powerhouse studio looks to make a big splash on Sony's new technology.

GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE

Likely titles: No More Heroes

THE JAPANESE POWERHOUSE will almost certainly make something for PSP2 although exactly what that will be is up for debate. *No More Heroes* remains the outfit's most prominent and ported title but with the developer having a history of innovative and brave IP, we wouldn't be surprised to see something new altogether that has interesting touch-screen use.

KONAMI

Likely titles: Metal Gear, Pro Evo

KONAMI SUPPORTED PSP with various *Metal Gear* titles ranging from *Acid* to *Peace Walker*, so it's likely that the series will rear its head on PSP2 as well. A lot of Konami's library should translate well to PSP2, especially now it has touch screen – expect *Pro Evo*, *Silent Hill*, *Castlevania*, *Contra* and even *Dance Dance Revolution* to make some kind of appearance.

PopCap

Likely titles: Peggle, Plants Vs Zombies

WITH POPCAP GROWING in prominence as a console developer, it's not difficult to picture the studio's wares making the leap to PSP2 in some form. *Peggle* and *Plants Vs Zombies* are the obvious choices but there's also the likes of *Heavy Weapon*, *Bejeweled*, *Bookworm* and *AstroPop* that stand out in their back catalogue, too. Maybe a PSP2 compilation is in order?

SQUARE ENIX

Likely titles: Final Fantasy spin-offs, JRPGs

THOUGH THE PSP never received a full *Final Fantasy* game, understandably, Square Enix showed plenty of support via the likes of *Dissidia*, *Crisis Core* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*. That should continue on PSP2 along with Square Enix's JRPG output, where games such as *Tactics Ogre* seemed to find a more comfortable home on PSP than on PlayStation 3.

- 2K GAMES
- ACQUIRE
- ACTIVISION
- ALVION
- AQ INTERACTIVE
- ARC SYSTEM WORKS
- ARIKA
- ARTDINK
- ASCII MEDIA WORKS
- AVALANCHE STUDIOS
- CAPCOM
- CAPYBARA GAMES
- CLIMAX STUDIOS
- CODEMASTERS
- D3 PUBLISHER
- DEMIURGE STUDIOS
- DIMPS CORPORATION
- EDIA
- EPIC GAMES
- EUROCOM DEVELOPMENTS
- EUTECHNYX
- EXIENT
- FAR SIGHT STUDIOS
- FIREMINT
- FRIMA
- FROM SOFTWARE
- GAMELOFT
- GENKI
- GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE
- GUNGHO ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT
- GUSTO GAMES
- HAMSTER CORPORATION
- HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
- HUDSON SOFT
- IDEA FACTORY
- IMPROMPTU SOFTWARE
- INDEX CORPORATION (ATLUS)
- IREM SOFTWARE ENGINEERING
- KONAMI
- KUNG FU FACTORY
- LEVEL-5
- MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT
- MEDIA5 CORPORATION
- NAMCO BANDAI
- NIHON FALCOM CORPORATION
- NIPPON ICHI
- NOWPRODUCTION
- PARAMOUNT DIGITAL
- POPCAP GAMES
- POWERHEAD GAMES
- Q ENTERTAINMENT
- REBELLION
- ROCKSTAR GAMES
- SEGA
- SIDHE INTERACTIVE
- SNK PLAYMORE
- SPIKE
- SQUARE ENIX
- SYSTEMSOFT ALPHA
- SUMO DIGITAL
- TEAM 17
- TECMO KOEI
- TOMY
- TRENDY ENTERTAINMENT
- UBISOFT
- WARNER BROS.
- YUKE'S
- ZEN STUDIOS

WHAT DOES THE INDUSTRY THINK?

Announcements can be full of hype and optimism, but now the dust has settled does the NGP still excite developers? We spoke to some of the best to find out

Cliff Bleszinski, Design Director, Epic Games

Our Unreal tech demonstration seemed to go over rather well, which the guys worked pretty hard on so that was good to see. I'm excited about it personally.

We haven't announced any actual products outside Unreal Engine being available on it. I liked seeing it because as much as I love iPad and iPod gaming – I'll be the first person there when the next *Angry Birds* updates hit – I'm glad to see a portable that has actual buttons and dual analogue on it. That combined with processing power leaves for a pretty sweet device.

Dual-analogue touch-screen controls do not work. It's fun for 15 seconds and then it's just friction burn. In the event we had the opportunity and time on Epic's side and we found a potentially good partner and the stars were aligned, you never know, you could see *Bulletstorm* on NGP somewhere down the line, but God knows right now man. That's a complete hypothetical.

Mie Kumagai, Virtua Tennis Creator

I'm very, very interested in PSP2 with the quality of the new screen, its sensor and the hardware it has. I've had a look at the specs and the hardware and I'd like to develop something for it, so I'm really looking forward to it.

Mario Wynands, Managing Director, Sidhe

NGP represents a bold move from Sony in that they are doubling down on the vision set by the original PSP and addressing many of its perceived weaknesses, while bringing much more to the table. Devs will be able to deliver rich console-like games through to low-cost casual timewasters and everything in-between. What software will resonate with purchasers of the NGP remains to be seen, but the possibilities offered by the hardware seem far beyond any handheld seen to date. If Sony can make the same leap with PSN services as they have with the hardware, then NGP entertainment experiences will be truly unique with respect to what is being offered via other portable gaming options.

JC Connors, Studio Head, Griptonite Games

We've been very impressed with all the stops that Sony's pulled out for the NGP. Clearly, they listened to developers – the second analogue stick, moving away from the UMD, the significantly enhanced memory, these are things that developers have been asking over the years. Just last year when we were wrapping up *Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines*, we spent long nights dreaming about getting away from some of these limitations, so the fact that Sony has addressed them all is a big win in the dev community. Everyone who worked on our original *Call Of Duty: Roads To Victory* game cheered when they saw that this new one has a second thumbstick!

If Sony had stopped with those features, we'd have been happy, but where the NGP really surprises and shines is the sheer volume and quality of input options. The NGP is an 'ultra-input' device, and this makes it potentially groundbreaking. It's a game designer's treasure chest – the multi-touch touch screens, cameras, the wireless and connectivity support, the three-axis gyroscope, the GPS, there's no limit on game design input with the NGP. With the first PSP, you really had to design around the control scheme and the 'nub'. Even with the original DS, you had a low-fidelity touch screen that you sometimes had to shoehorn into game design. The NGP inputs not only gives teams the ability to be creative, but the advanced tech allows good teams to refine those controls and inputs to a point where it's always going to feel great and impress players.

IT'S A GAME DESIGNER'S TREASURE CHEST... THERE'S NO LIMIT ON GAME DESIGN INPUT WITH THE NGP

What we've learned about working on the NGP is that you can't take advantage of every feature on the device. It's always tempting to design a game that uses everything! The NGP requires more discipline and design skill than other handhelds. We've spent enough time with the NGP to know that 'blitzkrieging' features into an overstuffed game design isn't going to work, and I'm sure we'll see some games that make this mistake, trying to cram every possible idea and tech use into a single game.

Fortunately, we've got enough expertise on consoles, handhelds, and mobile to really focus a great NGP game experience to impress players without overwhelming them with unused options.

The power and functionality of the NGP has got the industry talking.

The rear touchpad is an unusual, but potentially brilliant feature.

Brynley J Gibson, Game Director, Zoe Mode

It has the potential to be one of the great game consoles. Not only does it look pretty cool with that air of aspiration about it but it also has that power and functionality that can really free up creativity. As long as we as game creators make tailored handheld experiences and in doing so play to the strengths of the device then there will be some unique titles coming out. The idea of connectivity with NGP's big brother and creating linked but different experiences gets the mind racing.

Stuart Maine, Blitz Games, Design Manager

As a gamer, I'm excited by it. It looks powerful, looks cool and it has the kind of games I want to play. The other side of it is I'm interested to see how well it's going to do with the iPad and iPhone now out – have they stolen that market? Those games can be as cheap as 59p, so it will be interesting to see what happens.

Jared Gerritzen, Blacklight: Tango Down, Project Lead

The NGP is going to be huge, I'm so stoked to get one. I waited in line for the first PSP and I plan on doing the same for the NGP. Finally we have a handheld device we can play an FPS on. I primarily play shooters and the fact that Sony has added a touch sensor on the back end of the device is genius, as it will let you fire or tight aim in shooters and free up the shoulder button. I'm a HUGE *Killzone* fanboy and can't wait to have that for my commutes and travels. Honestly, I think I'll be playing it on my couch at home, too. You also can't go wrong with *WipEout*! Yes Sony!

Atsushi Inaba, Producer, Platinum Games

As a gadget it looks really cool and I can see that there are many things that you could do with the machine. But in terms of being a gaming console I'm still not sure if that is the main focus of Sony. I'm still trying to determine what they're trying to sell us, if it's solely dedicated to gaming or if it's a bit of everything, like a multi-purpose gadget.

We'll have to wait for the next bit of news to find out what they're trying to do with it. In terms of purpose the 3DS is much clearer. They have clearly indicated their target and what they're trying to do so it will be interesting to see Sony's next move.

IN TERMS OF BEING A GAMING CONSOLE, I'M NOT SURE IT'S THE MAIN FOCUS OF SONY

Skyrim vs Oblivion

RESPECTING YOUR ELDER SCROLLS

Not sure how much better Skyrim looks compared to Oblivion? Allow us to walk you through the immense difference Bethesda's latest engine, Creation, is having on its Elder Scrolls sequel

FEE-FI-FO-FUM

This image was simply labelled 'Giant', but regardless of their size you can see the difference between the two characters in terms of texture detail and lighting. *Oblivion*'s Minotaur looks remarkably accomplished, but this Giant from *Skyrim* feels weathered and aged. It looks like it belongs in the world that surrounds it. That's an incredibly important thing for Bethesda as it wants the fantasy world of Skyrim to feel as realistic as possible.

WOOD YOU?

It's clear from this shot that hunting will play a part in *Skyrim*, but take a look also at the trees and the foliage between the two. The Creation engine generates foliage tree by tree, giving each branch its own weight and each tree its own density. That means wind will move each tree differently and the forests will look incredibly unique.

FLESH & BONES

Lots of things to notice here. First the *Skyrim* enemies clearly have a lot more detail to them. These undead-looking monsters aren't just skeletons. They have flesh and armour. The lighting is also an interesting thing to pick up on. *Oblivion* looks rather flat compared to *Skyrim* and that's because of new lighting and shadow tech. Shadows are now cast on everything, not just certain objects as before. That gives everything more atmosphere.

AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE

While the first thing that is likely to grab you with the *Skyrim* shot here is the presence of a Dragon, we would ask you to look a little around this dramatic centrepiece and consider the draw distances Creation is capable of giving us. These far outstrip what the *Elder Scrolls IV* engine gave us and that was rather impressive for its day. The two game worlds will be of a similar size according to Bethesda, though.

SPIRE HARD

The difference between images here is stark for a number of reasons. First, of course, is the detail once again. The *Skyrim* structure looks lived in and old. You get a real sense of its place in the world and its history. What you also see, though, is the ambition of the locations in *Skyrim*. This building looks to be an incredibly complex piece of architecture set within a valley with even more buildings shooting off from it.

A SEASONAL MENU

What we have is an image of the Skills menu from *Skyrim* and a spell menu from *Oblivion*, which went for a parchment-based system that was quite detailed and complex. It may be intimidating for newer players, but Bethesda has overhauled the menus for its latest game. It claims to have been inspired by the interfaces used by Apple on things like the iPhone and iPad. Sounds interesting.

WENCH WATCH

Again things like lighting and texture seem apparent, but there's more going on between these two images. For a start the *Skyrim* images show NPCs interacting in the background. Thanks to the Havok Behavior engine NPCs will be performing jobs when you meet them and may even carry on with a task as you chat. The general model structures are also much improved in *Skyrim*.

MONSTER HUNT

Once again we're struck by some of the differences in texture quality between the games. *Skyrim*'s troll has hair that stands away from the body, muscles that seem tensed and skin that's wrinkling under the strain of his roar. We don't get any of that from a similar monster in *Oblivion* where the fur seems clumped together and completely inactive. We look forward to seeing how much of this detail carries over into the finished game.

One Nation Over God

With BioShock Infinite poised to be one of the most ambitious games on PlayStation 3, there is immense pressure to deliver. The man at the centre of it all? None other than Irrational Games' Ken Levine, who talks exclusively to **Play** about all things BioShock from the storyline twists to the reason multiplayer never made it to why Move support isn't going to happen any time soon…

KEN LEVINE
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

THOUGH HE'S BEEN a big name in PC gaming, it was *BioShock*'s success that brought Ken Levine and Irrational Games to the attention of console gamers. One of the founding members of Irrational, he's also the company's creative director.

Elizabeth's powers will help you without necessarily making the game too easy – see the 'fan' scenario that Ken Levine references

What inspired you to develop *BioShock Infinite*?

We kicked back and forth a bunch of ideas. We had the luxury of spending some time after *BioShock* to figure out what we wanted to do next. We thought about another game in Rapture and realised that wasn't the right thing for us, we played with a couple of other concepts… we actually even did a prototype for something else. We were halfway through that prototype but nothing was really grabbing us until we had this meeting of the senior creative folk at the company.

Stephen Alexander, our senior effects artist, said what if we were to do a *BioShock* game that totally reboots everything, resets everything, rethinks everything except some of these core principles? For a room full of guys who never immediately agree on everything, there were about ten of us around the room or so, we all immediately got excited.

So we started thinking about different time periods and different settings, just a notion of talking about what is really a *BioShock* game at heart? What we realised is it wasn't just Rapture. It was the principle of being in this unique, amazing, ridiculous but grounded in human experience kind of place and having the tools – powers in one hand, weapons in the other hand. Everything else we felt was up for grabs. That really excited us because it really scared us. We wanted the challenge of it to do something the same but also different.

Going on those core principles, what do you think *BioShock* does that no other FPS does?

It does two things. One is you have to create this world that is completely unique, that no one has ever seen in a game before, this incredible, over-the-top, fantastic world that you can't really experience in any other media. Because even in a movie, you're not in the driver's seat, right? You can't just go over here and look at this tiny corner and see this little memorial that somebody has set up when her husband died. That's part of what the *BioShock* experience is, it's an archaeology experience. Think about most shooters… even fantastical ones like *Halo*. Really, what can you learn by walking around that world? Not that much. We really put so much detail into the world.

Also, these worlds are kind of absurd and kind of ridiculous and over-the-top but also, at the end of the day, they feel very human and very believable in their own way. Rapture felt like a place people lived in even though it's a city at the bottom of the ocean. Come on, let's get serious. It's ridiculous!

NO MARKETING DEPARTMENT EVER TELLS IRRATIONAL WHAT THEY CAN OR CAN'T DO

But that makes it interesting as well.

Yeah, I think that's what draws people to it. That mixture of the absurd and the grounded. The other thing with shooters is generally, you get a bunch of guns. I think with *BioShock*, you have lots of other ways to interact besides weapons. *BioShock 1* you had the plasmids, *BioShock Infinite* we've talked about the powers you have, different ways of interacting with the world, the kind of AI interactions we're going to have. AIs weren't necessarily your friends or your enemies, if you go back to the Big Daddies and Little Sisters. In *BioShock Infinite*, there's tons of AIs who don't necessarily just attack you when they see you. They're not there just to shoot you. Figuring out what may set them off or may not set them off or maybe if there's any way they can help you, that's one of the interesting things. Those are things you normally see in RPGs I think.

It's also interesting how *BioShock* is a story-driven FPS, while the FPS genre is trending towards multiplayer. Why is *BioShock* the only FPS series focusing on story over multiplayer?

I think it's primarily because it's something we do and we know how to do it. I don't really see Irrational as a studio coming out with 'let's make a competitive first-person multiplayer experience where you're running around headshotting each other!' We just don't have that core experience and we really have to have something unique to say to go into that space. If we want to do a multiplayer experience we have to make something uniquely us. In the same way when you're looking at *BioShock*, people who followed us understood, they understood that when *BioShock* came out, with the history of

System Shock, it was something that made sense for us. Not a lot of people were doing that. So if it's doing something in your core strength as developers and you're fairly unique in doing it, why would you not do that?

On that note, the original pitch documents for *BioShock* mention story-based multiplayer. Why was that dropped in the end?

There's two reasons some things get dropped from a game. One is time. Two is if you have the time, energy and resources, do you think you can execute it well? We're fortunate. No marketing department ever tells Irrational what they can or can't do. The creative direction comes from the creatives at the company. Did we earn that trust with the company? I think they were very supportive of the decision not to do multiplayer. Certainly now, we get the trust of the company that if we think something is the right thing to do, we get to do it and if we don't think we should do it, we don't do it. I think most developers don't have that luxury so often. We didn't want multiplayer. At a ratio of more than 10:1, *BioShock* was our bestselling game. You listen to years of marketing guys at other publishers saying you have to do multiplayer. And look, it's true that a multiplayer mode gives a stickiness to your product that few other things can. However, it's only meaningful if you have a world-class multiplayer.

There's a heavy Americana vibe running through *BioShock Infinite*, with subtle messages on the game's themes evident in the posters and scenery...

Looking at the 'would you kindly' twist, do you feel pressure to create similar twists in BioShock Infinite?

You know, the twist wasn't like I set out to make a game with a twist in it. I've written a lot of game stories in my life. Sometimes I used twists, sometimes I didn't. I think it's so organic to the nature of that story that you can't really imagine that story without that twist. That whole story was about identity and freedom and I don't know how to tell that story without messing with people's expectations along those lines.

So we always go into every story saying, 'what's right and what's wrong for this story?' Not 'okay, here's a

IRRATIONAL GAMES

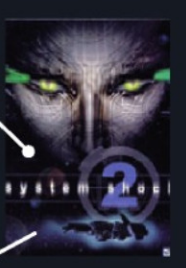
History of a brand-new PS3 power player...

THOUGH IRRATIONAL GAMES wasn't always onboard with PlayStation 3 – *BioShock* was originally an Xbox 360 exclusive – it did eventually make its way to Sony's console. With *BioShock Infinite* due for release in 2012, it should wind up being one of the most ambitious titles on PlayStation 3 and almost certainly one of the best looking.

But who is Irrational Games? Where did it come from and what's its past? The company's been around for longer than you may have realised...

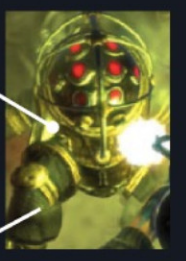
1997 The birth of Irrational as former Looking Glass Studios employees Ken Levine, Jonathan Chey, and Robert Fermier get together to create the new studio.

1999 The studio releases *System Shock 2* on PC to critical acclaim.



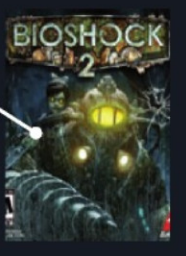
2006 2K Games acquires Irrational Games. Out of its present studios, only Firaxis has been under the 2K umbrella for longer.

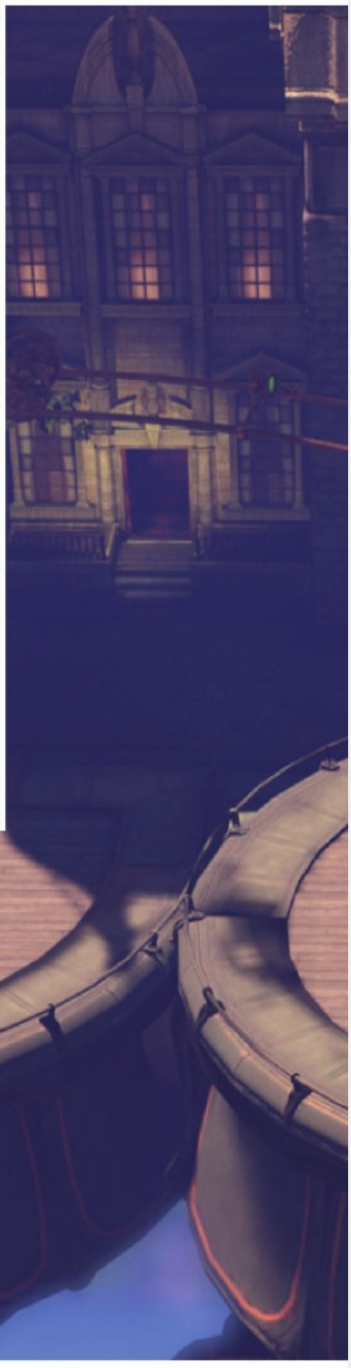
2007 *BioShock* is released to rave reviews, becoming the surprise hit of 2007 and putting the studio on the map. Irrational Games becomes 2K Boston.



2008 After being left in the lurch, PlayStation 3 finally gets its own release of *BioShock*. The port isn't quite as well received as the Xbox 360 version.

2010 2K Boston announces its return to its original name, 'Irrational Games' on 8 January.





checklist of things we need.' We really worked hard at making Columbia not be a world where you come in and the story's over, as *BioShock* was. That you're actually coming in as the conquest tearing at the heart of the city is still running hot, not running cold. The fact that all these people are all around, the fact that Elizabeth is with you, these things are quite epithetical to experiences you have with our games before...

So Elizabeth was brought in as a way to ensure you're never alone or were there other reasons, too?

That was a very personal thing for us. When you see another person in a *BioShock*, they're behind glass windows. That's something I think I probably invented in *System Shock 2*, the trick of putting someone behind a glass window. After a while... it worked great for ten years [laughs], by the time I thought of *BioShock*, I played it through and looking at *BioShock Infinite*, I thought... we've done this trick. I'm not saying you'll never encounter someone behind a window again [laughs] but I want to stop relying upon it.

With Elizabeth, we said to ourselves as a challenge, 'okay Irrational, you're going to have Elizabeth with you for a fair amount of the game. Deal with it. Figure this out. Make this work with the kind of gameplay you have. Make this work with the kind of storytelling you do. Make this work with the environments. Make this work!' And it was a challenge. It was tough. But we felt we owed that to our audience to really try to stretch our boundaries.

Is Elizabeth also a way to extend player choice in *BioShock Infinite*?

Yeah. She provides a bunch of roles in the game. One is she's a strong narrative presence. Everything in the world revolves around Elizabeth and your relationship with Elizabeth. She doesn't know why. You don't know why. Part of the strength of the game is understanding who she is, what her abilities are and why everyone wants a piece of her. But then she also provides, in terms of gameplay... Elizabeth becomes a catalyst for an even higher level of grandeur and powers that wouldn't be practical by just direct player input. She provides opportunities, which you can elect, these even bigger powers like bringing down structures and rain clouds to enhance your electrical powers. She makes these opportunities for you.

There's a scenario in a factory level. The environment is where metal statues are being cast and there's tons of steam in the room and there's a fan that pulls the steam out. That fan gets destroyed and therefore you're in this room where all these enemies are coming at you but your visibility space is very low. Elizabeth can find a way to resubstantiate a working version of that fan but only if she has the time. So you never have to protect her from enemies in terms of her health but she can provide an advantage for you by clearing out the steam. But you have to make sure she's not being attacked, so she can provide cover for you.

We're working on all these things in the world, none of which will ever be about an escort mission or 'you can't progress unless Elizabeth plays the game for you'. How do you make an AI companion really valuable and part of your powerset without ever making it that you have to protect her or her drive the game for you? That's the challenge of Elizabeth and also the joy of working on her.

Was it a challenge to integrate her without compromising it being a *BioShock* game?

That's one of the challenges we gave ourselves. We said we want to make a *BioShock* game but we don't want you to be alone because that's easy for us and it can get boring for the gamer. What we're really doing, in both *System Shock* and *BioShock*, your character is a non-entity. By decision. We really wanted you to be a person this time. So Booker DeWitt, the character you play, is a person. He talks. He reacts. He comments on the situation.

We wanted to get out of that you're-a-nameless-cipher space because we've done that. Pretty much that's the way it was in *BioShock 2* as well. Delta wasn't really a character, I don't think. He was a bit of a cipher, too. I'll be honest with you, the first question was, 'oh shit, how do we do all this and make this a *BioShock* game?' [laughs]

If Elizabeth over-exerts herself, the damage to her becomes evident. Another example of moral choice? That's for you to decide...

I COULD MAKE A LEFT 4 DEAD CLONE BUT GAMERS WON'T CARE

One major gameplay difference between Rapture and Columbia is how the action also works on a vertical level as well.

Friend? Foe? Irrational promises that NPCs won't just attack on sight, lending interesting ambiguity to each different situation.

But that's part of the fun, making it work and making it a *BioShock* game.

Always taking the difficult route.

Well, we're lucky that we get to say, 'let's make this challenging', because I think if you don't make it challenging, then gamers know. If you're not challenging yourself, if you're not asking questions you don't know how to answer... look, I could go make a *Left 4 Dead* clone right now and that would answer all those questions, but the gamer is not going to care because they've already played it. We talk about a system that's like, 'oh well, you know this game had this system? Let's use that but we're probably not going to do it as well'. Guess what? Gamers know because they've already fucking played it. Excuse my French.

That leaves us in a tough spot because we've got to figure it out, right? At the end of the day, if we do our job right... worst case is, you try something new, you don't figure it out and gamers are like, 'what's this crap?' Best case is you figure it out and the gamer is excited and feels like he's touching something he hasn't touched before.

Was PlayStation Move ever considered for *BioShock Infinite*?

For us, I'd have to think of something... like when we talked multiplayer, what's the uniquely *BioShock* application of any kind of piece of hardware? I'd never want to throw in Move support just because it's going to make first party happy or because the marketing department wants it on the box, because, at the end of the day, the gamers know. If you don't have anything special to say about that control device, gamers are going to know.

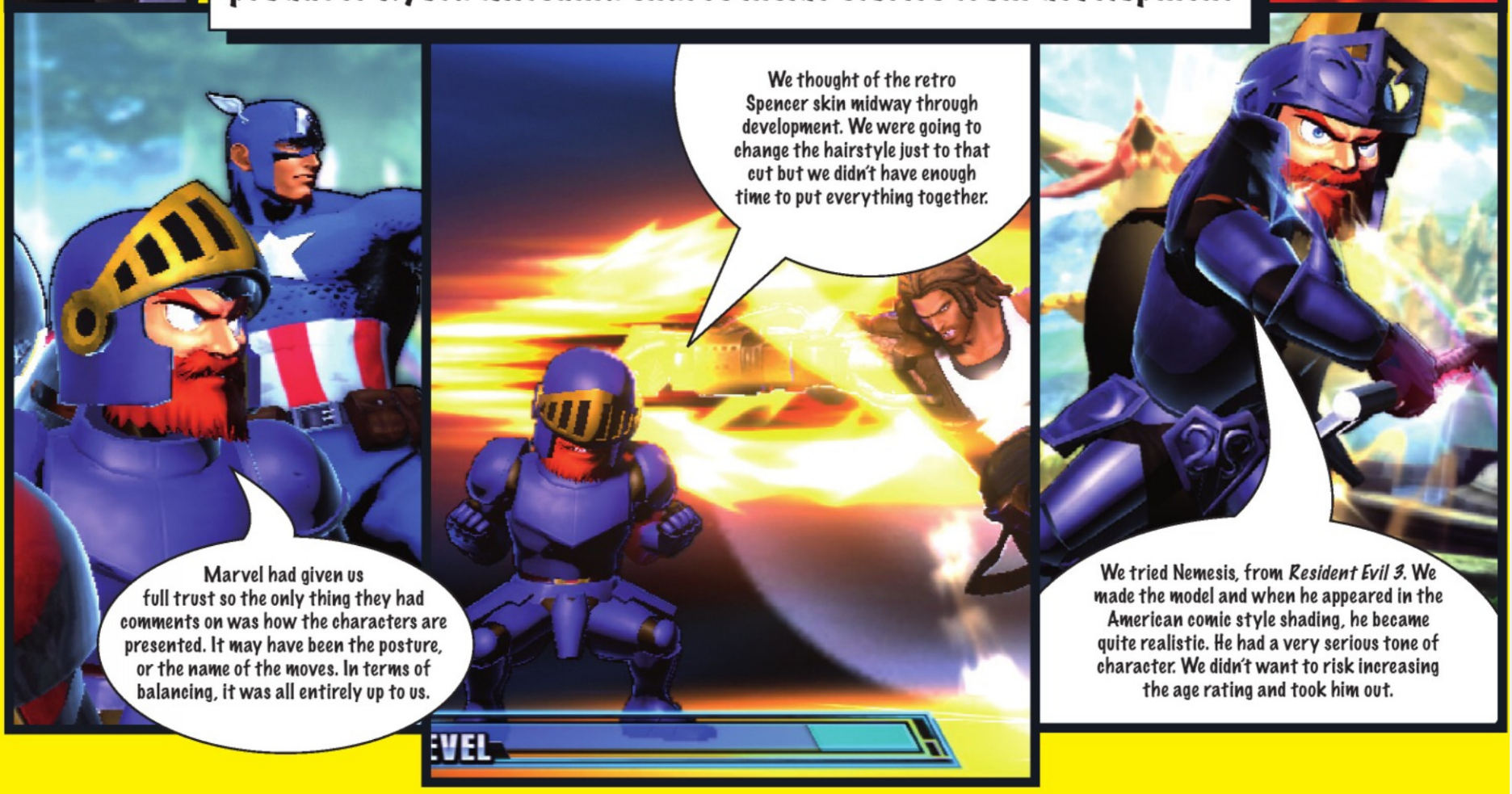
And I guess it's the same with 3D as well?

Exactly. If it's just let's do it because it's easy, and we've all had that opportunity, gamers are going to know. 3D is a little bit different... it's something I'd be more open to. I'm not saying whether we're doing that or not but it's sort of a passive integration. Unlike movies, you don't just shoot it differently. Games are 3D. But I think if you're going to really get out, front and centre on something, you have to be able to say you're doing something special with it. Especially with a control device. Do you really want to play *BioShock* and it's like, 'okay, do you want to harvest or save Little Sister? Waggle left to harvest, waggle right to save!' You can have Move support on your box but people are going to know you're cheating them. So you do whatever work it takes, but all you're going to do is animate your fanbase unless you have something special to say. Same goes for multiplayer. People know when you're not doing something special. FIN

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3

BEHIND THE SCENES

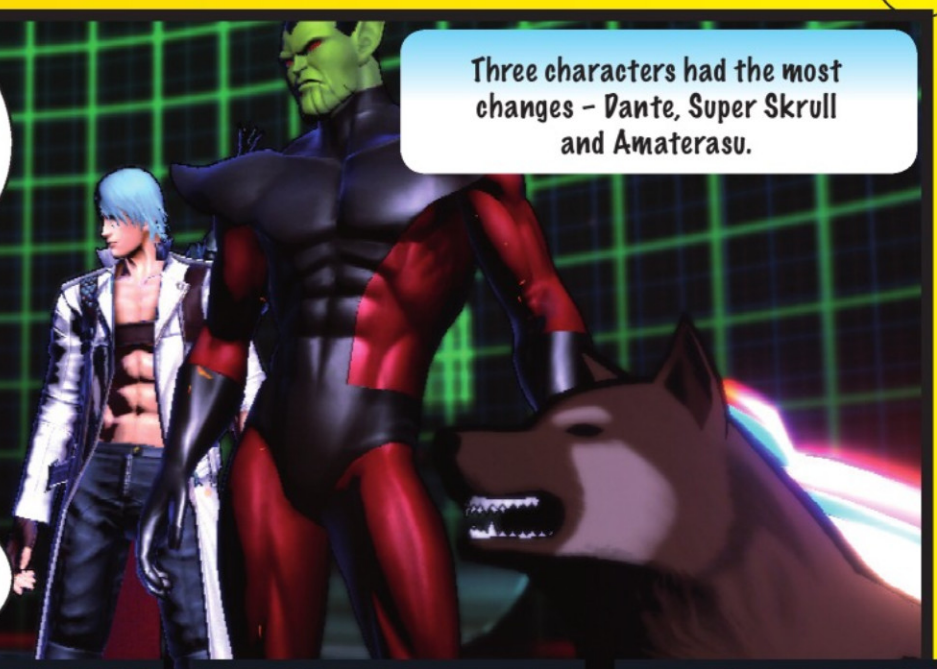
Represented by Capcom mascot Arthur, Marvel Vs Capcom 3 producer Ryota Niitsuma shares inside stories from development



Super Skrull had amazing moves that came out with just pressing buttons. No commands needed. You just button mash and he would be amazing. So we had to bring everyone else up to his level.

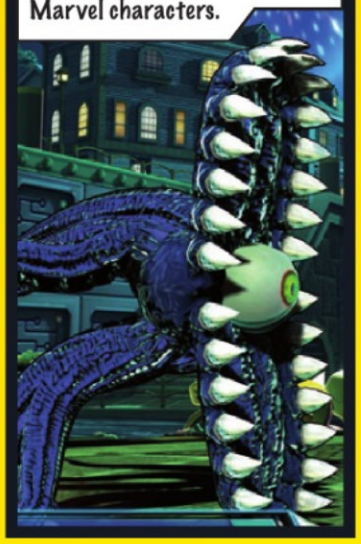
Same with Dante. He has so many moves that if every single move was as valuable as others, he would be overpowered.

Amaterasu has a small hitbox and several moves that fill the entire screen, so she was sitting there, not getting hit and hitting the entire screen.



Three characters had the most changes – Dante, Super Skrull and Amaterasu.

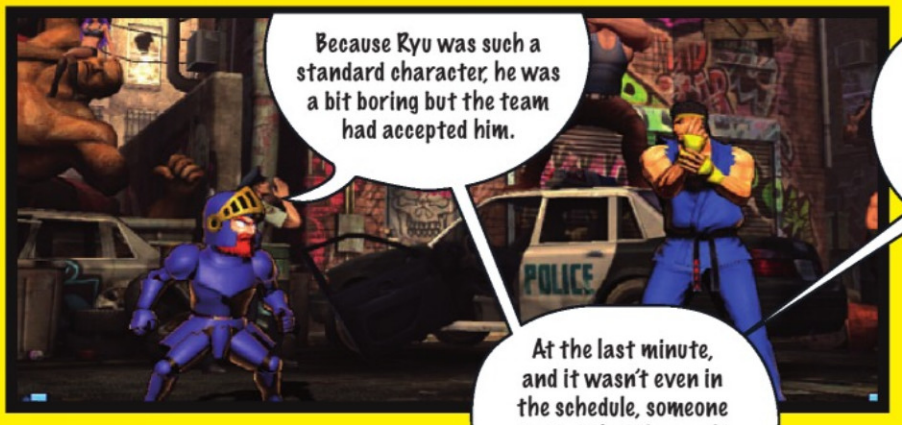
Shuma isn't too famous. He has this WTF factor of 'Why Capcom?' kind of thing. If you're a fan of *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, you know what we're talking about. He's definitely one of our favourite Marvel characters.



We wanted him to be in the main roster but Marvel said... why Capcom? They wouldn't let us. We like all his tentacle bits and things but Marvel wouldn't budge. In the end, we managed to convince them to have Shuma Gorath as DLC character.

Shuma Gorath was an extreme case so when we suggested other Marvel characters, we didn't really push for them. Marvel suggested other characters instead and they were usually good, so we didn't really fight for any other characters we wanted.

Shuma Gorath is really quite... special.



Because Ryu was such a standard character, he was a bit boring but the team had accepted him.

At the last minute, and it wasn't even in the schedule, someone decided that Ryu could change the direction of Shinkuu Hadouken.

When he did it upwards, because the pose is so cool, we decided that should be Ryu's trademark move.

We rushed it into the game and Ryu has his own style now, so he stands out.

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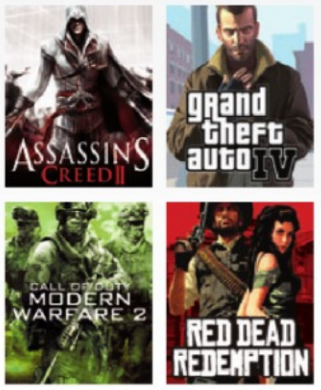

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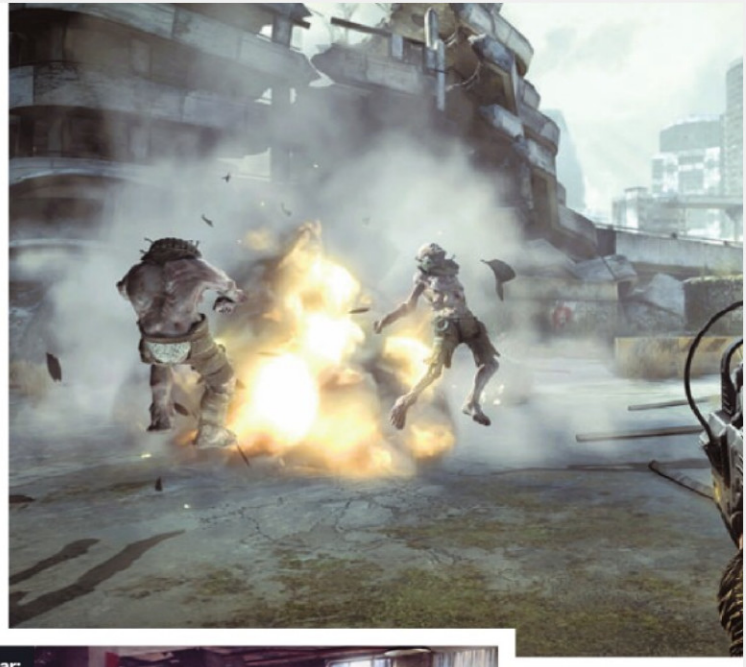
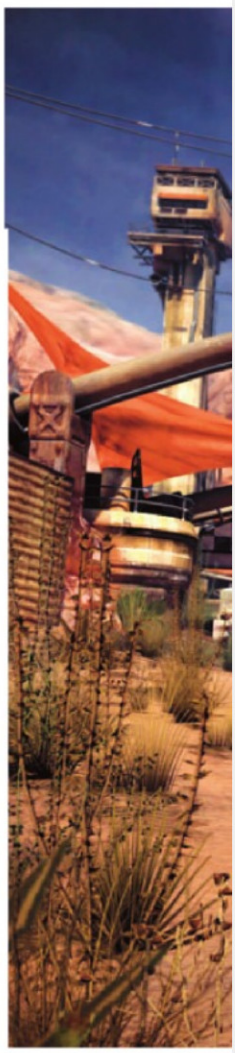
PREVIEW

Didn't we review this game on page 84? (*MotorStorm* reference, could change).



An arachnophobe's worst fear: a spider with a gun on its head.



RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER

Rage

RAAARRRRGGGGHHHHHH!!!!!

PS3

There was a time, many years ago, when id Software was *the* go-to developer for FPS gaming. Before *Call Of Duty*, before *Half-Life 2*, even before *GoldenEye*, id was laying down the template with titles like *Doom* and *Quake*. id wasn't just an FPS developer, it *was* the FPS.

Today things look different. The FPS now has far more in common with Hollywood blockbusters than traditional videogame concepts. Their narratives are scripted by movie writers, they contain characters the player can relate to, and they borrow elements from the RPG and racing genres. In this new FPS landscape of multimillion-dollar budgets and billion-dollar revenues, the once untouchable id – which hasn't released a new IP since 1996's *Quake* – looks a little archaic.

2011's *Rage* is more than just id's first new IP in 15 years, then. It's the game with which id must prove itself capable of sitting alongside the big hitters of the industry, to show that it can deliver an experience that goes beyond the thrill of hacking up monsters with a chainsaw.

And from what we've seen, *Rage* is more than up to the task. It may not feel as expansive as *Fallout 3*, or as narratively absorbing as *BioShock*, but *Rage* pinches from these games and delivers a lighter, old-school version of the FPS that has somewhat been forgotten over the years. Oh, and it looks better than *Killzone 3*. Yeah.

Rage's post-apocalyptic wilderness is an eye-watering sight. Cragged, jutting rocks arc across the sky; fractured highways are littered with burntout cars and lined with claws of broken metal; old gas stations sit lonely and abandoned. It's desolate, but beautiful.

And it's thanks to id Tech 5 and a new technology labelled 'Mega Textures' that such vibrantly detailed landscapes are possible, with every surface texture being different from the last.

During our demo our first destination in this brave new world is the above ground settlement of Wellsprings, a hub from where you can take on missions from various characters, or opt for smaller side-missions. A bounty board, for instance, offers a series of sniper missions, while a bartender offers us cash for any bandits we manage to drive off the road. There are also shops where we can buy or sell ammo, equipment, parts and vehicle modifications.

Vehicles play a large part in the open plains of *Rage*'s badlands. Their handling is crunchy, responsive and easy to get used to, and each vehicle class can be upgraded with a variety of items including guns, rockets, force shields and incremental speed upgrades. This is rather helpful in the wild, where you're often set upon by bandits, but it's also useful during Speedways – a racetrack where you can attempt to win money and a better reputation.

There's also a televised combat arena hidden in the wasteland, named Bash TV. Here you must fight off waves of mutants in a frenzy of twitch shooter mayhem, while also avoiding traps like spikes that spring from the floor.

Combat is at the core of *Rage*, and will define the majority of your time spent in its world. Gunplay is solid and defined, id's heritage felt in every bullet fired. It's also felt in delightful old-school design decisions, like the ability to carry multiple weapons rather than just carrying and replacing two or three. All weapons have alternate fire modes, too, such as Fatboy rounds for the pistol that turn it into a one-shot-kill sniping weapon, or electrical bolts for the crossbow that come in handy when multiple enemies converge in a puddle of water.

Equipment's also an important asset. If you've got a blueprint and have collected the required parts from the world, then you can build several items to help in combat and exploration. Lock-grinders can tear through sealed doors, while the Wingstick is basically a knife-edged boomerang. Higher-tiered equipment consists of items like the RC-XD-esque RC bomb, a turret, and the Spiderbot – a droid that follows you, shooting foes. Enemies will also use these items, making *Rage* both an exhilarating combat experience, and a varied and tactical affair, too.

So, are you still struggling to define *Rage*? Allow us to do it for you. It's not an RPG, or an open-world game in the strictest sense, but a deep, riveting action shooter, with more diversity and choice than we've seen from id before. More importantly, *Rage* is the game that shows id has matured alongside the industry, and that it *can* keep up with the competitive contemporary FPS. Take our word for it. There's much more to this game than good looks.

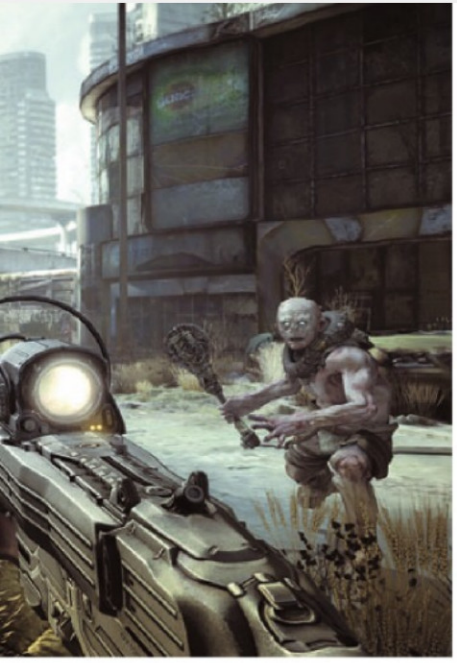
Rage is currently being developed by id Software. For more information and to find out more about the game check out the website **www.rage.com**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's created by the developer that invented the FPS genre.
- id Software's id Tech 5 engine looks absolutely phenomenal.
- John Carmack worked on it and John Carmack is great.
- You can decapitate enemies with a knife-edged boomerang.

READ ME

An asteroid has hit the Earth. Emerging from an 'ark' you must wander into the wasteland to uncover the mystery behind your identity.



Werther's Originals adverts got a bit weird in the future.

INTELLIGENT DESIGN

John Carmack, technical director

What's changed in the FPS scene?

I was honestly thinking for a while that there was this growing trend towards third-person display because it allows more cinematic behaviour and tools to be applied there, and because there's such a rich heritage in cinema, and we'd never had that at id. But it's been nice in the last five years to see things swinging back towards the benefits you get from the FPS. You can't control the cinematic experience as well, but you get that level of intensity, shock and surprise when you're being projected into the game. That's the core value of it and that's what we're working on.

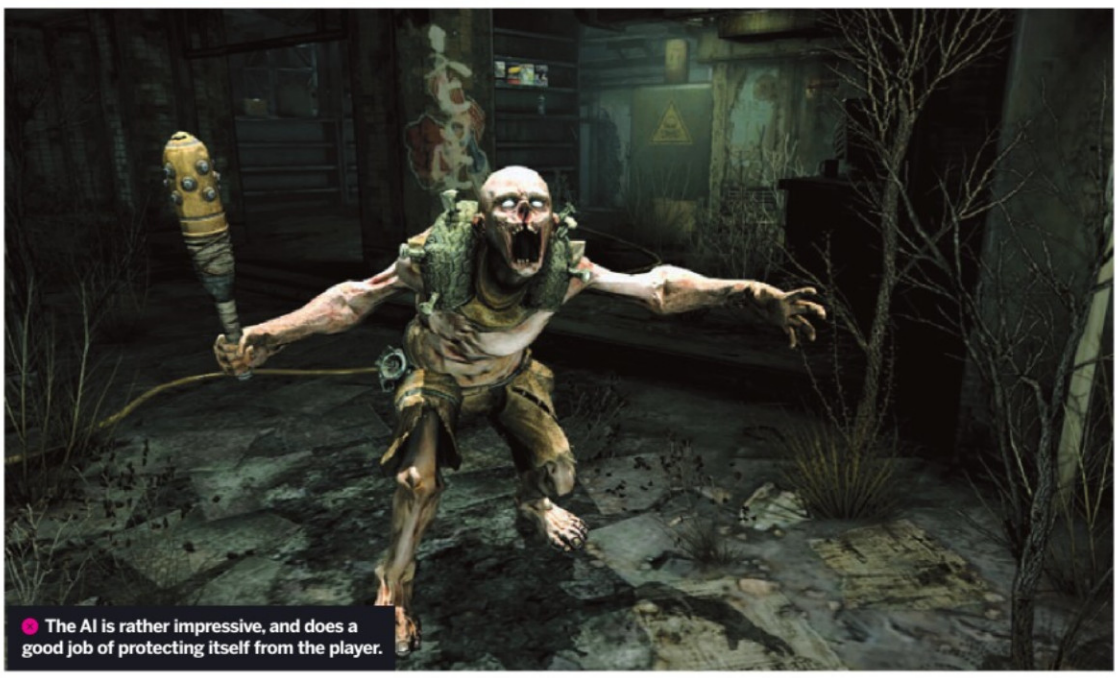
What specific challenges does the PlayStation 3 present?

This has been discussed many times over, but the architectural decisions of having the Cell processors versus additional symmetric processors makes life more difficult, it's harder to develop for those. The upside is there is more raw performance for computing than on 360. The PS3 is still far and away better than anything else that's ever been made... except maybe the 360. It's a great time to be a developer. It's not like working with the Sega Saturn or the PS2 where there are these quirky, cranky architectures. But because I do favour the 360, it doesn't mean I have anything all that negative to say about the PS3.

How important is story in a game?

Historically, we were able to get on for a long time at id without addressing story specifically because it was all about gameplay mechanics; the core experience of what you're going through, and showing people things they'd never seen before on their systems. I can say a lot of parts in *Rage* look better than anything anyone's ever seen before. I think we have some pretty memorable characters, too, stuff that we never tried to do before beyond stock central casting roles of 'badass marine guy'.

The Crossbow can fire both electrical and explosive bolts.



The AI is rather impressive, and does a good job of protecting itself from the player.

Screens simply can't do the facial recognition justice.

Melee combat can be activated suddenly and is both accessible and quick.

Although there will be gunplay where necessary, it's used sparingly, giving *L.A. Noire* a distinct and mature feel.

Driving is both satisfying and fun, making the occasional chase an absolute riot.

RELEASE DATE: MAY

L.A. Noire

You're good. You're very good...

PS3

With the history of *L.A. Noire* well documented, let's get straight to business. Following the story of former WWII soldier turned beat cop Cole Phelps, our journey begins at a murder scene. One man dead and another on the run, the only stub of evidence that exists is the gun used. Time for *L.A. Noire* to shine.

The area is littered with evidence, but only a small vibration and a light noise will summon your attention to a clue. Even then, with red herrings about, you decide what's important. With the location of the crime explored, only a chance glance in a window reveals the weapon is lying on the roof. Time to find the owner.

Travelling around, the city benefits from many Rockstar staples, but these tried and tested techniques haven't aged and work effortlessly within *L.A. Noire*'s template. Arriving at the gun store, the shop's log book gives up the exact address of our prime suspect. Cole decides to confront Edgar Kalou, as the conversation erupts into a punch-up, concluding with a possible killer taken in for questioning. Instantly impressive, it's clear this serves to introduce and educate, the complete opposite of what's next.

Jumping forward – Phelps is now a detective, working in homicide – a young Mexican lady known as Antonia Maldonado has been murdered. In her home, a smashed window in her room provides the opening for Team Bondi to show off its next fine mechanic. Interrogations are always a huge part of *L.A. Noire* and they're a credit to all involved. Constantly posed with three reactions – truth, doubt or lie – you examine your interviewee's face and body language to determine what they know, or what they're hiding. Naturally you have evidence at your disposal, and learning how to combine the two is captivating. Catch an individual out and the feeling of satisfaction is difficult to top.

Thankfully we achieve the former, chaining together the events of the previous night. Antonia had been at a bar, summoning the courage to serve her husband Angel with divorce papers. Your pathway suddenly opens up. Do you question her other half, or instead attend the bar she frequented hours earlier? We head to her last-known whereabouts, meeting a bar tender still aware of our girl, mainly due to her high consumption of alcohol. He

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Incredibly intense and edgy interrogations that test intellect and cunning.
- Face animation that is so scary you'll mistake the in-game characters for real people.
- A methodical, well-thought-out pace that not many other games dare to play around with.
- The potential to be accessible to a wide-range of people, even those that don't 'game'.

had sent her to get a cab from a fruit stall opposite but with the shop closed for now, Angel must be investigated.

Arriving at his apartment, a shady character rushes from the shadows to ignite a second melee brawl. When grounded, the revelation that his wife is dead comes as a surprise. Taking him downtown for questioning, it's another chance to use your intuition and collected materials to put Angel on personal trial. The psychological games *L.A. Noire* plays with you are tantalising. You can always backtrack after an error, but it's a mistake you instinctively want to avoid. Mr Maldonado appears guilty but there's no hard proof. Off to the fruit stall...

On entry we bump into owner Clem Feeney. After brief questions he allows us to explore the premises, where we find a blood-stained shirt and knife, along with a missing jewellery box belonging to Antonia. Despite being almost too easy, Feeney scarpers, triggering a car chase that fits the atmosphere perfectly – the frantic pursuit ends with Clem in cuffs. However, something doesn't feel right...

These are just two of *L.A. Noire*'s cases which highlight how diverse and engaging it is, not to mention fresh and daring – Rockstar and Team Bondi's project could be a genuine masterpiece, if not completely awe-inspiring.

L.A. Noire is being developed by Team Bondi and Rockstar Games. Visit **www.rockstargames.com/lanoire** for details.

READ ME

***L.A. Noire* was once a Sony exclusive, but when the Japanese giant pulled out, Rockstar stepped in to help craft the experience that we have today.**

FACE-TO-FACE

Could this be magic?

THEY SAY SEEING is believing, but it's still hard to explain or fathom just how impressive the facial animation is in *L.A. Noire*. An incredible breakthrough in technology, it also plays a major part in the game itself. Phelps, being the detective he is, has to be able to read people, or at least try, and this would be near impossible without such real-life body language and reactions. It also sucks you into its narrative far easier and deeper than many of its competitors, simply because what's transpiring in front of you seems so real.

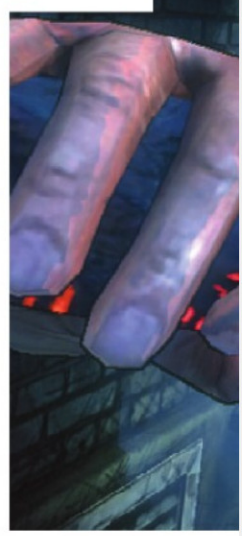
That's not to say Rockstar wants you to rely on your wit alone, however. To add yet another element into the mix, Intuition Points can be gained to help with the case. Used to either reveal all examinable items in a room for a timed period, locating landmarks or take away one of the options when you're grilling someone, it's a fantastic way to not only give a spot of assistance if needed, but to encourage you to continue on.

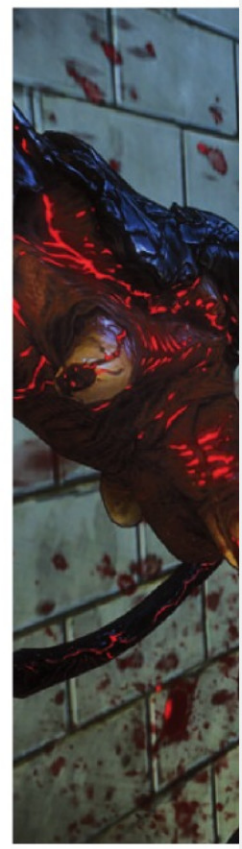
Just another day on the job...

PREVIEW

You've only got one Darkling companion this time, but he's much more fun.

The cast of twisted characters you'll be meeting looks to be as good as before.





RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER

The Darkness II

He believes in a thing called slaughter

PS3 The connecting line between comic books and videogames is strong and has never been stronger than during this generation of consoles. Thanks to games like *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* we're getting truly excellent comic-inspired games this generation, but it was all kicked off by Starbreeze and *The Darkness*. This peculiar first-person shooter set the comic adaptation bar by reinventing and moulding the comic to suit a videogame setting, but retaining the core ideas that made its inspiration feel so fresh.

Now in the hands of *Dark Sector* and *BioShock 2* multiplayer developer Digital Extremes, *The Darkness II* is seemingly taking Jackie Estacado even closer to his comic-book roots and adding a much-needed splash of colour to the dark and dingy New York that Starbreeze once created. Graphic Noir is what the Canadian development team is calling it, but you might recognise it as being similar to the look of *Borderlands* or 2008's *Prince Of Persia*. It's given *The Darkness II* a little more contrast and colour and basically brought back to it some of the garish neon glow that made the comics so interesting.

> We've got a mix of extreme violence, brighter colours, more humour and more action to look forward to

A little more dark humour will also be creeping its way, tentacle like, into the game. The Darkling count has been cut from many to just one as the team wants to have more of a connection between Jackie and his impish companion and, as such, there's also a lot more conversation to keep the chuckles coming through the game. He's got a thick cockney accent, wears a Union Jack shirt and pisses acid onto people's faces. All in all exactly the kind of chum you would want to spend time with.

But this isn't all for laughs. The power of the Darkness have also been simplified and focused for *The Darkness II* in line with the Darkling cull. Jackie's tentacle arms will now have specific functions, with the right tentacle being used for slicing and dicing your enemies – making precise movements to make just the cut you want – and the left arm will be used for picking up and grabbing objects. Long story short, one arm dices and slices and the other arm can throw lampposts through people's heads.

As you may have experienced from playing *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, Starbreeze tends to give players a lot of open sections, hub levels and people to converse with.

In order to speed things up a little and keep a tighter rein on things, Digital Extremes wants to make something a little more linear and considered with bigger set pieces. Linearity gets a hard time, but when it's done right it can really pay off and that's what the developer is hoping for here.

And to help keep things in check from a comic fan's perspective while also making sure that at least a little of the original game carries over to this one, Paul Jenkins, the writer of the original *Darkness* game as well as a sizeable portion of the comic-book series, is back on board as lead writer, pulling the strings. He's actually the only member of the original development team still working on the project, but given his connection to Top Cow (the publisher of *The Darkness* in comic-book form) and Jackie Estacado, he's kind of the most important person to have around.

So we've got a mix of extreme violence, brighter colours, more humour and more action to look forward to and while some Starbreeze fans may bemoan its move to a new developer, we get the feeling Digital Extremes is moving *The Darkness II* in the right direction.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- A more graphically violent take on the original *Darkness* comics, which is saying something.
- Much more focused on set pieces and action than on exploration. Expect some big bangs.
- Interesting new abilities for Jackie's tentacle arms as he continues to master his powers.
- A cockney Darkling? Sure, we can get with that, so long as he doesn't support West Ham.

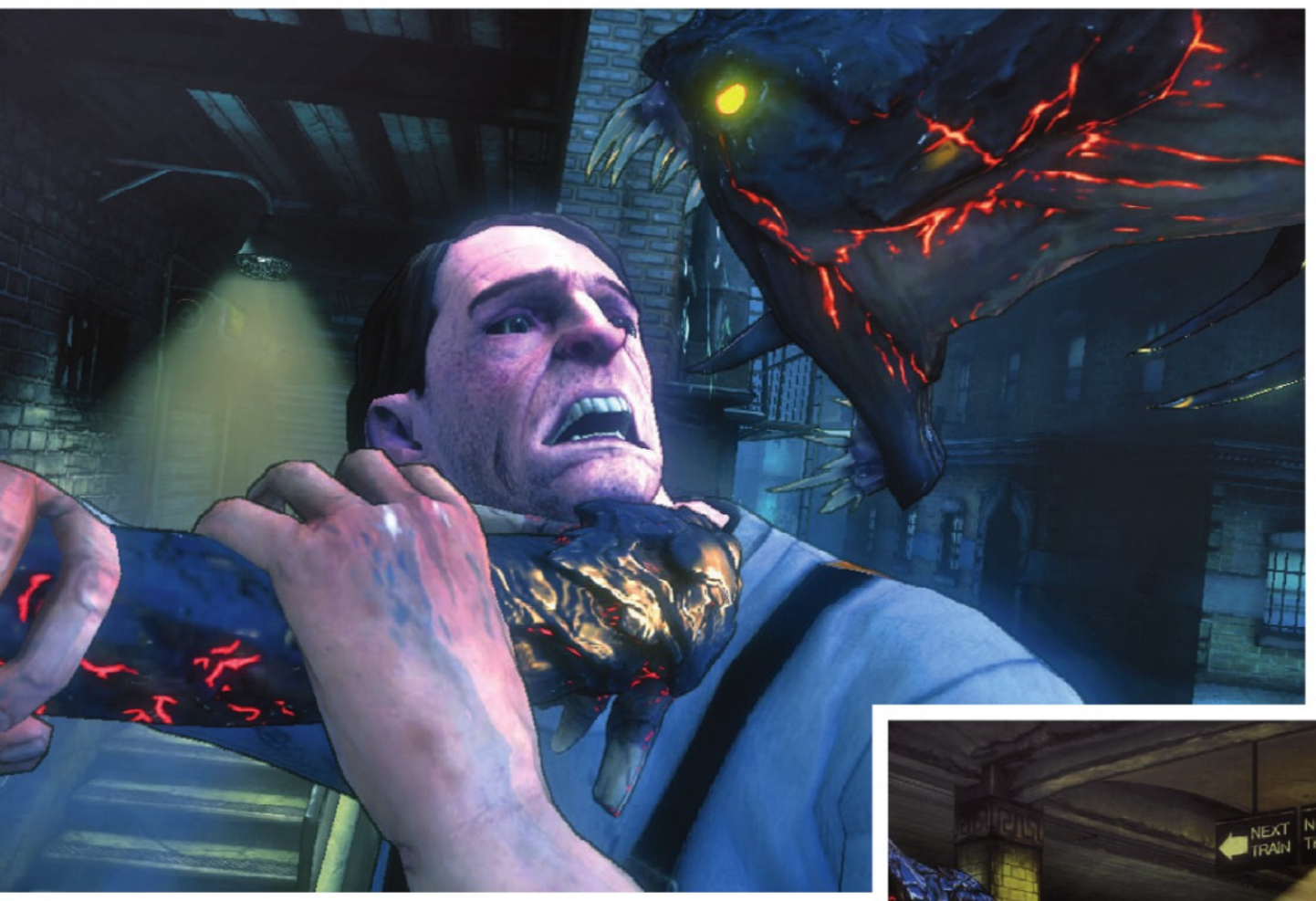
READ ME

Digital Extremes has said it still won't be heading too far down the supernatural path that the comics have taken over the years.

Development of **The Darkness II** has moved from Starbreeze to *Dark Sector* maker Digital Extremes. Keep an eye on **www.embracethedarkness.com** for info.

You'll be seeing the high-class lifestyle of a Mafia hitman as well as its dark side.

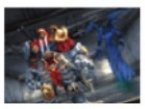
Your demon arms have much more specific jobs to do in *The Darkness II*.



DARK-O-METER

How dark is The Darkness II?

Darkstalkers



Darksiders

The Darkness II

Alone In The Dark

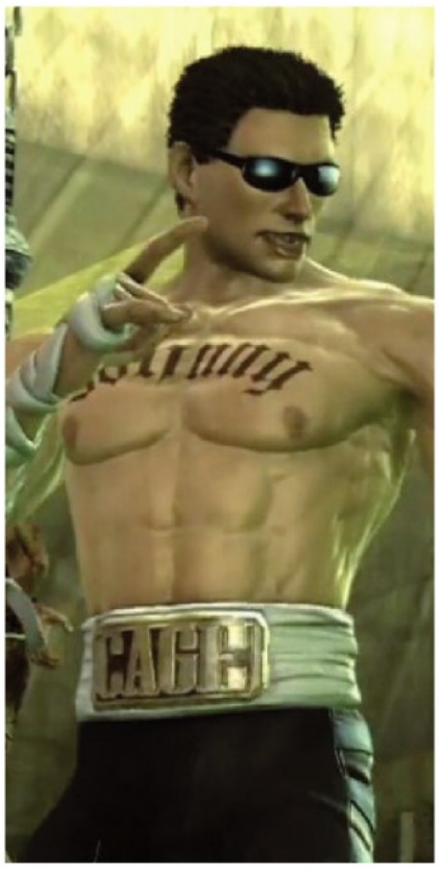
Chronicles Of Riddick

Not Very Dark

Pitch Black

Digital Extremes is pulling no punches in the gore and blood stakes. The sauce will be flying.

PREVIEW



RELEASE DATE: APRIL

Mortal Kombat

We request you hum the Mortal Kombat theme while reading these two pages

PS3 One phrase uttered by a NetherRealm staff member during a recent presentation of *Mortal Kombat* says it all, really. He may have spent the prior ten minutes discussing complex Breaker moves and updated character design, but upon uttering "we've spent months working on blood technology" he'd said the words everyone wanted to hear.

Because yes, *Mortal Kombat* is about buckets and buckets of blood – the way arterial spray gushes from a wound, how it seeps from a swollen eyeball, the manner in which is cascades across the screen when a torso is diced into meaty cubes. There's no doubt about it. *Mortal Kombat Vs DC*'s family-friendly approach is a thing of the past – this is a game about killing people using a variety of imaginatively macabre methods.

In celebration of these deadly finishers, we're dedicating these pages to the *MK* characters and Fatalities revealed thus far. But let's not sell this game short. There was another phrase uttered during the presentation that also struck a chord: "We have what we think is a tournament calibre fighter on our hands." Although *MK* requires little of the dexterity or patience required from the combat-meets-chess gameplay of *Street Fighter*, it is a careful, paced game that demands knowledge of each character and their abilities to come out on top. This is certainly no dumbed-down brawler. It just so happens there are a lot of cracked skulls and broken ribs to be winced at along the way.

> Mortal Kombat is about buckets of blood

Mortal Kombat is being developed by NetherRealm Studios. Check out **www.themortalkombat.com** to find out how it's progressing.

SCORPION

How he plays: Powerful but still fast enough to get in some quick one-two combos, Scorpion is a good all-round fighter, with plenty of blade and fire-based moves. Also, "GET OVER HERE".

Fatality: Scorpion gets his two blades and slices his opponent clean through at the neck and torso. He then kicks the cadaver, and slices the head in two while it's still flying through the air. Nasty.

JOHNNY CAGE

How he plays: Does anyone care about Johnny Cage? Johnny Cage has lots of moves. He can punch and kick. He can punch people in the balls. That's all we have to say about that.

Fatality: Johnny Cage uppercuts his opponent's head off and then rips their torso in two. He then holds up the head like he's really proud of himself. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO BE PROUD OF JOHNNY. THAT'S A CRAP FATALITY.

JAX

How he plays: Jax has two massive metal arms, so expect to see lots of powerful slams and ground pounds with which to beat your opponent into submission.

Fatality: Jax squishes his opponent's head with a slap and then follows it up by pulling off their arms, which is just taking things a bit too far, really. He then wraps himself in an American flag, making himself look like a massive cock in the process.

SEKTOR

How he plays: Sektor is the red robot, and the one that uses missile-based attacks. He's a good choice if you're more comfortable taking enemies out from a distance, but up close he loses the advantage.

Fatality: Sektor fires a missile into his opponent, splattering them into four separate meaty chunks. He then targets each lump of corpse individually, blasting them into oblivion with another four projectiles.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- There's a great nostalgia factor to the characters and levels.
- The X-Ray moves are pretty nasty, so should become fan favourites pretty quickly.
- It's not just a button basher – there is a lot of depth to be found here.
- It's got, like, loads of blood, guts and all that gory kinda stuff, innit.

READ ME

The *MK* characters aren't always fighting tournaments. Scorpion's day job is as a whaler, Sub-Zero works for the British Refrigeration Association, and Cyrax earns extra cash as a printer at JP Morgan.

UPDATE

REPTILE

How he plays: Reptile still has many of the moves you'll remember from past games, like the ability to spit acid, go invisible, and shoot a big, weird glowing ball that moves across the screen at a speed of about one foot per second.

Fatality: Reptile vomits acid in his opponent's mouth then pulls out some unknown organ. It's definitely an important one. Not one of those rubbish fake organs like the spleen.

KUNG-LAO

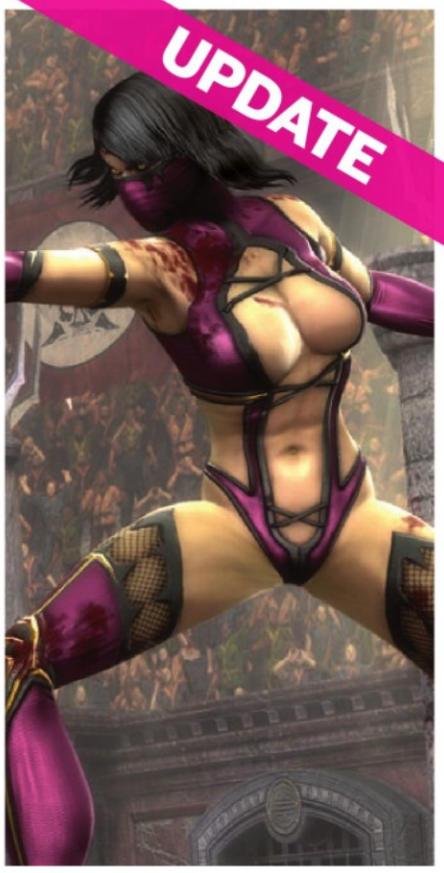
How he plays: The only man in the world with a sharper hat than Oddjob, Kung-Lao has plenty of bonnet-based manoeuvres to keep his opponent at bay, but plenty of quick one-two punch combos, too.

Fatality: The one Fatality revealed isn't as bad as that in the E3 trailer. Here he just decapitates his enemy with his hat, then cuts the remains with a vertical slice down the middle. Yawn.

CYRAX

How he plays: The not red robot, and the one who uses bombs instead of missiles. He can fit a lot of bombs into that chest compartment, causing us to wonder what else he can fit in there. Narnia?

Fatality: His arm turns into a whirling blade, which he uses to slice his opponent into tiny giblets. If they ever make real-life robots like this we're moving to the Moon.



MILEENA

How she plays: Fast and nippy with a mix of close combat and ranged moves, she still has that teleport kick that we spammed repeatedly to complete *MKII*. She also has big boobs.

Fatality: Mileena sticks two blades in her opponent's chest, then decapitates them and eats their face with her frightening, spiky-toothed mouth. She then does a sexy pose. It deeply confuses us.

KITANA

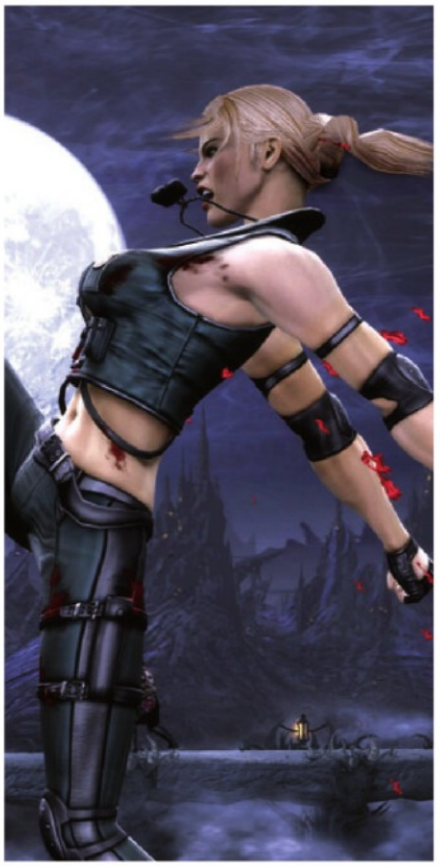
How she plays: Kitana fights with a pair of fans. We've often wondered why people fight with fans. Why not just use two swords instead? Surely that would be more useful in a fight. Or just get an Uzi. Or a flamethrower.

Fatality: Kitana uses her fans to amputate her opponent's arms, and then takes their head off. All that effort when she could have just pulled out a gat and shot her opponent in the face. Much easier.

SUB-ZERO

How he plays: Surely you know how Sub-Zero plays, right? He shoots ice out of his hands. Sometimes he freezes his opponent. What we're basically trying to say is he's as cold as ice. He's willing to sacrifice our love.

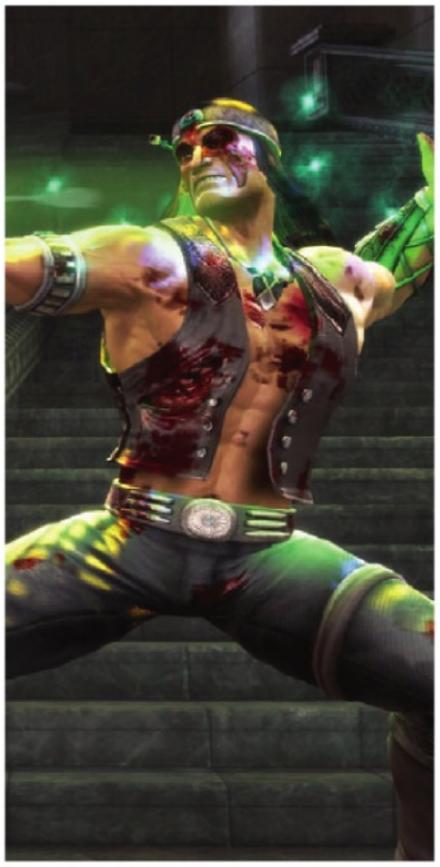
Fatality: Sub-Zero freezes his opponent's legs to the ground, then rips off their upper half and holds it up for all to see. The only thing that's missing here is Sub-Zero saying, "You're not sending ME to the COOLER."



SONYA BLADE

How she plays: Sonya Blade is a very gymnastic and flexible fighter, and she uses lots of throws and airborne kick combinations to wear down and knock the energy out of her opponent.

Fatality: Sonya picks up her opponents with her legs, and then pulls them apart in a spray of dark red blood. How do you even get legs that strong? We get tired simply from walking up a flight of stairs.



NIGHTWOLF

How he plays: One of the more technical fighters, we get the feeling that Nightwolf will be tough to master. But if someone takes the time to learn, his mix of projectile and close-quarters specials could be a deadly combination.

Fatality: Nightwolf embeds one magical tomahawk into his opponent's cranium, and then uses another to decapitate them. We wish that we had magical tomahawks. We would use them to solve crime.

PREVIEW

Goons with guns will be the priority when attacking large groups of thugs.

BIG SCREEN

Shouldn't Batman use that helicopter to get around? What a flaming idiot.

The room is far too big for her but at least the rent is cheap!

BATMAN'S FOES

Who you'll be up against

IT CAN NO longer lay claim to having the biggest collection of *Batman* villains on PlayStation 3, thanks to the release of *DC Universe Online*, but *Arkham City*'s rollcall of those up to no good is looking pretty healthy regardless. Two-Face, Joker, Harley Quinn, Victor Zsasz, Mr Freeze, Catwoman, Talia al Ghul and Riddler feature with Calendar Man also rumoured. The *Arkham Asylum* ending also leave possible returns open for Scarecrow and Killer Croc.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 2011

Batman: Arkham City

Take me down to Arkham City

PS3

Remember 'Sharpy', 'Mr. J' and 'the B-Man' from *Arkham Asylum*? That's what Harley Quinn called Warden Sharp, Joker and Batman. She came up with silly nicknames, taunted Batman over tannoys and cartwheeled away from danger... until Batman caught up, slammed his fist in her jaw and locked Harley in one of the cells. We can't remember if he did actually punch her or not, actually, but when doesn't he punch people? He's bloody Batman.

When the credits rolled and the loose ends were tied up at the end of *Arkham Asylum*, we never did find out what happened to Joker's squeeze. Turns out, she's been shopping and bagged herself a tighter corset (**Play** approves) along with a baseball bat (**Play** definitely approves), which should mean Batman has an actual showdown with her this time around. Yet, more than that, we really want to know what her nicknames for the game's new faces will be. Two-Face becomes Twoster? Mr Freeze named M-Free? You can see why **Play** is still waiting for the call to help write the script.

> We never did find out what happened to Joker's squeeze

Batman: Arkham City is being crafted by the clever bods at Rocksteady Studios. **Batmanarkhamcity.com** is the simple URL you need to type in for more info.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- Sequel to arguably the most surprising hit released this gen.
- Features a selection of Batman's greatest adversaries including Two-Face and Hugo Strange.
- Its predecessor had some of the sharpest scripts we've heard in any game.
- It's *Batman*, for god's sake. And it is bound to be good. What else do you need to know?

READ ME

The madness and gameplay of *Arkham Asylum* shifts to the bigger Arkham City, as a host of new villains make Batman's life miserable.

PREVIEW

FIRST LOOK

Djokovic vs Roddick. At tennis. Say what you see!

Hasn't Nadal completely missed the ball here? This is why we couldn't commentate on tennis.

RELEASE DATE: Q2 2011

Virtua Tennis 4

The best Move game ever made!

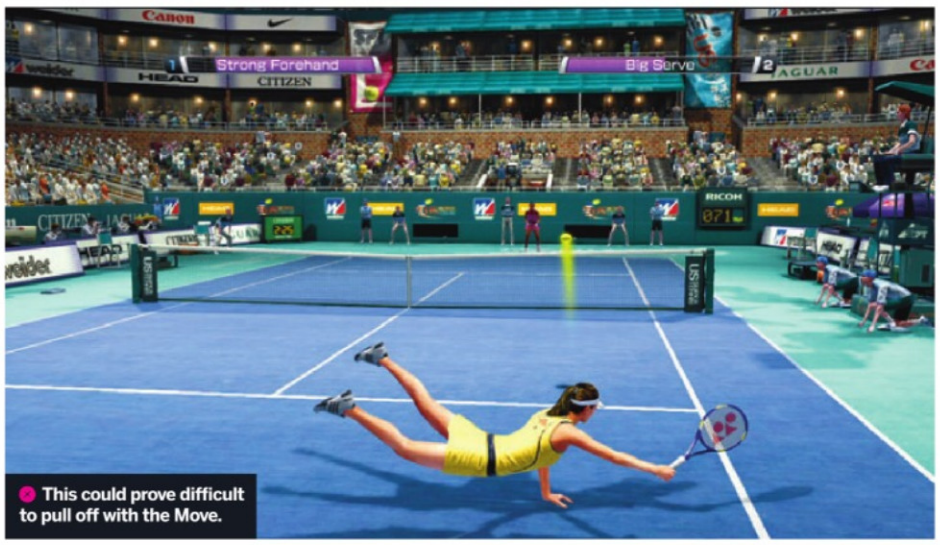
PS3 Well, maybe. Pardon the overblown standfirst. We're taught in Journalism School to write standfirsts that catch your attention and you're reading this, so hey, it worked! Plus, there's a good chance that standfirst will turn out to be true as well.

Not necessarily because the Move competition sucks (though it does) or even because tennis is one of those games that translates well to motion control (though it is), but because Sega has ensured *Virtua Tennis 4* was made with Move in mind. You can step forward or backwards to determine whether you're playing at the net or not, with left and right movement decided for you. Then all you do is swing the racket, while twisting Move will let you add spin to your shots. Executive producer Mie Kumagai told **Play** that Move was the lead motion control for the developers, so we'll have the definitive version.

Virtua Tennis 4 also has 3D, for those who have shelled out for the technology and cry every night over the lack of 3D games. It's an effect that works well, adding depth to the court and slotting in nicely alongside Move. It's not exactly got the visual sex appeal of a *Killzone 3* but it's looking damn nice so far.

Old-school fans and purists will want to know about the game itself. Sega made all the right noises in this regard – World Tour has been revamped so it's fun, Momentum shots give players a one-off power shot when built up through their particular playing style and original developer AM3 has been brought back into the fold. It's looking good but fingers crossed, this will be the best Move game ever made. If only so it doesn't make that standfirst look ridiculous, as much as anything else...

Virtua Tennis 4 is being smashed together by the folks at Sega, so check out **sega.com** for more details.



This could prove difficult to pull off with the Move.

If she's not Sharapova, then we don't care.

GAME CHANGER

Using momentum

EACH PLAYER IN *Virtua Tennis 4* has a different style of play – Nadal has Solid Defence, Monfils is a Counter Hitter, Murray has a Strong Backhand and so on. When you play these shots, your momentum gauge fills and you can then play a powerful Momentum shot. It adds a new element to the classic gameplay without overcomplicating things.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It only uses three buttons. In 2011! How is this even possible!
- Supports 3D and Move and, best of all, it uses both rather well.
- Will be sporting the same netcode that *Virtua Fighter 5* used.
- Sweaty, grunty Maria Sharapova. For us, that's worth the price alone. Mmmm.

READ ME

The series' original developer, AM3, will be at the helm for *Virtua Tennis 4*, after Sumo Digital took the reins for the previous *Virtua Tennis 2009*.

Respite is a lie. RESPITE IS A LIE.

FIRST LOOK

RELEASE DATE: TBC 2011

Dark Souls

Hold me, thrill me, kiss me, kill me, kill me, kill…

You're supposed to try not to wake him up. Idiots.

PS3 More exploration. More multiplayer options. More weapons. More spells. More failure. More death. More being killed by seemingly non-threatening opponents. More frustration. More repetition. More failure (again). More of one of the best games we've seen on PS3. More *Demon's Souls* – except with a different name, now.

Technically *Dark Souls* isn't a *Demon's Souls* game, and as far as From Software is concerned it isn't a sequel to that PS3 classic. So instead we have to refer to it as a 'spiritual successor'. But what we've seen so far of *Dark Souls* is very much in its forebear's footsteps – only ramped up in many ways.

With the same team behind *Demon's Souls* on board, it's easy to understand why *Dark Souls* takes a lot of ideas from the precursor and improves upon them, rather than completely changing them. As such, you'll be looking at more exploration, more tactical combat (though we weren't privy to what exactly that means just yet) and more spells, like the ability to turn into a vase. No, really – think about it: you're being hunted by someone who has invaded your game. What better way to hide than to look like a vase? It raised a few chuckles during the presentation, but it's easy to see a solid foundation in usefulness there.

And that's the rub with *Dark Souls* – it doesn't look, at least from our limited walkthrough of an early version – like it will revolutionise the path *Demon's Souls* set out on. It will, however, refine and improve upon some already fantastic ideas – and that's a Very Good Thing.

Aside from any new additions, any upgrades to the format and any improvements From Software might be making, there's one thing nailed-on, a stone-cold cert and absolutely guaranteed: you're going to die. A lot.

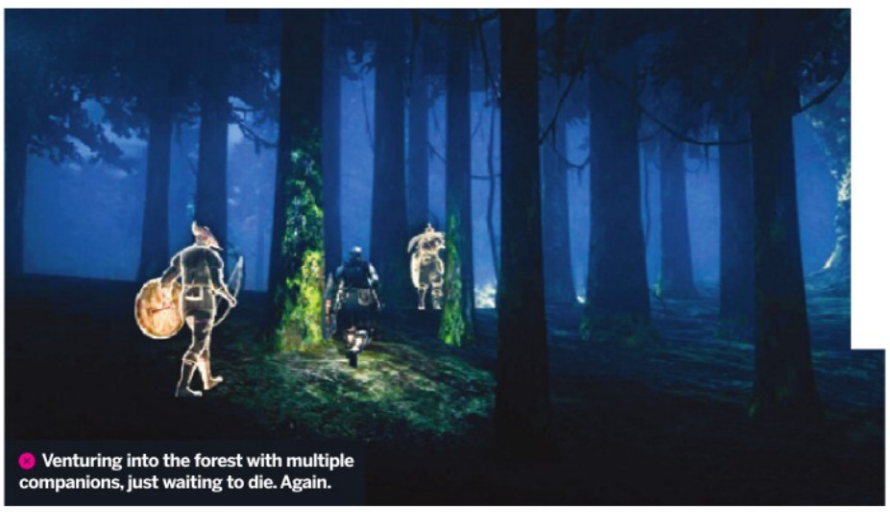
Dark Souls is being developed by From Software. Check out **www.fromsoftware.jp/game/projectdark** for more details.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- *Demon's Souls* was an amazing game. *Dark Souls* is more of that.
- A seamless (though not quite open) world to explore.
- No concessions are being made for new players. In fact, it's actually harder.
- From Software wants you dead. Really, it does. Millions and millions of deaths.

READ ME

Play loaned its copy of *Demon's Souls* to Simon Miller. It took six months to return. During that time, we had to play *other* games. *shudder*



Venturing into the forest with multiple companions, just waiting to die. Again.

EXPLORE YOUR SOULS

Because straight lines are boring

DARK SOULS ISN'T an open-world game – we were explicitly corrected on that point by its creator. What it is, though, is a game that offers players the chance to explore in all directions for new paths, new traps, new enemies and new rewards. Getting knocked off a platform isn't the end of things – it might well just open up an entire new path.

This cutie pie probably will kill you.

In co-op, one player will have to take on the role of Point Man's dead brother Paxton Fettel.

We miss Monolith Productions.

RELEASE DATE: MAY

F.E.A.R. 3

A monolithic absence of quality

PS3 Upon seeing *F.E.A.R. 3* demoed in the darkened cinema room at Warner Bros. HQ we couldn't help but wonder, what on earth is Monolith Productions up to these days? Where is the developer that gave us the excellently crafted terror of the first *F.E.A.R.*, and the Hollywood action of the second? It seemed to have disappeared from the spotlight following *F.E.A.R. 2*, leaving *Fracture* developer Day 1 Studios to pick up the reins.

And what a terrible mistake that appears to have been. *F.E.A.R. 3* looks like a less scary, less visually impressive, and more shoddily put-together version of the *F.E.A.R.* we know and love. Basically, Day 1 Studios is standing on the shoulders of giants, and its footing is visibly shaky.

The core concept here is the implementation of co-op, with one player taking on the role of original *F.E.A.R.* protagonist Point Man, and the other his dead brother Paxton Fettel, who is now a psychic ghost. We didn't get to see co-op in action, but rather each character playing the same level separately. Point Man plays exactly as you would expect – all gung-ho action antics and bullet-time firefights (which in this game look less like *The Matrix* and more like someone's rubbed Vaseline all over the screen).

Fettel's gameplay is slightly more interesting. His right hand curled and emanating energy like that in *BioShock*, he can lift enemies up into the air and use his powers to either crush them in a dark splotch of blood, or possess them and play as that enemy for a limited time. In the section of the game we saw played, this included *Condemned*-esque knife-wielding maniacs and psychotics with bombs strapped to their chests.

In co-op this ability has interesting applications – Fettel could possess enemies in previously inaccessible vantage points, or jump behind a group of foes while Point Man takes them out from the front. There's an opportunity there for tactical, co-ordinated play.

But is that what *F.E.A.R.* is really about? No. The name says it all, and when playing in co-op we can't imagine *F.E.A.R. 3* being very scary at all. How exactly do you choreograph scares when you've got a comforting buddy by your side, and you don't know where your players are looking?

Everything about *F.E.A.R. 3* looks amateurish compared to previous efforts. Please come back, Monolith, or at least announce a new *Condemned*.

F.E.A.R. 3 is being developed by Day 1 Studios. Find out more at **www.fear3.co.uk**

F.E.A.R. 3 simply isn't as scary as earlier games in the series.

SCORING TERROR

Creating a replayable experience

ALTHOUGH WE DIDN'T see a great deal of it in action, *F.E.A.R. 3* has a scoring system working away behind the scenes that Day 1 says will make repeat playthroughs all the more enjoyable. Players are scored on various combat skills, and these points can then be used to level up your multiplayer character. Exactly what multiplayer involves we're not yet sure – Day 1 isn't talking about it save to say it's going to be a very innovative use of the co-op mechanic. Of course it is.

Point Man plays as you'd expect, while controlling Fettel is a slightly more interesting proposition.

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- The new focus on co-op promises new tactical options.
- You can possess enemies and use their weapons.
- You get to play as a ghost... although that makes the game a little less scary.
- There's a new scoring system that unifies single-player and multiplayer.

READ ME

Alma is pregnant and ready to give birth, her contractions sending deadly shockwaves across the world. Is *F.E.A.R. 3* the first game to be a metaphor about the pains of labour? No. Likely not.

Jack from *MadWorld* is to appear in the game. If you haven't played *MadWorld* then let us tell you; this is *brilliant.*

FIRST LOOK

Because in Japanese games you can never have a big enough sword.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 2011

Anarchy Reigns

Will this game be nothing but total anarchy?

PS3

Several months ago, we were lucky enough to sit down and chat with executive director and producer at Platinum Games Atsushi Inaba, the man behind a list of titles more impressive than Corporal Baron Dr Judge Raymond Baston esq PhD MA BSc. During our conversation we asked Inaba why Platinum Games is yet to have attempted multiplayer in any of its previous games. After sharing a few unsure looks with the Sega PR, Inaba tentatively revealed that Platinum Games' next title would indeed be multiplayer focused.

Anarchy Reigns is that game, described as a "massively multiplayer melee fighting action game", which will pair traditional brawler gameplay with a persistent online environment. This pairing of brawling with multiplayer elements is something that's never been attempted before, and with good reason. It's bloody difficult.

Platinum Games is renowned for its fluid, precise, and satisfying combat gameplay, and that's all well and good when playing against an AI with perceptible attack patterns. However, delivering the gameplay of *Bayonetta* against the non-scripted, unpredictable behaviour of another human is no easy task. But that's just what *Anarchy Reigns* intends to do, including such multiplayer modes as Tag Team battles and Battle Royal, where players can take on others in a full-on fight for victory. For the experience to be technically challenging *Anarchy Reigns* will have to borrow a lot of ideas from fighters such as *Street Fighter IV*.

But we're still hopeful. After all, this is Platinum Games we're talking about here; one of the best Japanese developers around, and one that's never sought for anything less than total originality and innovation in its games. *Anarchy Reigns* will be a difficult one to get right, but if anyone can do it, Platinum can.

Anarchy Reigns is being published by Sega. Check out the website for more details: **www.sega.co.uk/games/anarchy-reigns/**

STAR TALENT

Who's behind Platinum's latest?

EVERY PLATINUM TITLE released so far has had some big name working on it, with Hideki Kamiya heading up *Bayonetta* and Shinji Mikami the man behind *Vanquish*. Here the talent is one Masaki Yamanaka, character designer on *MadWorld* and lead artist on *God Hand*. "The challenge of creating a brawler like this is second to none," he says. "I'm making this the game that I've always wanted to play, and I won't stop until that is what it becomes."

Platinum Games clearly had a lot of practice sculpting callipygian buttocks when making *Bayonetta.*

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- It's being developed by Platinum Games, a developer synonymous with quality.
- There is a lady with a bottom in it. A really lovely bottom it is too.
- You can use a chainsaw. Chainsaws are pretty bloody awesome.
- It's Platinum Games' first attempt at a multiplayer-focused title.

READ ME

The gameplay is similar to that of Wii title *MadWorld*. *MadWorld*'s lead character, Jack, will also appear in the game, but it's not a sequel.

FIRST LOOK

There's no beauty contest mini-game.

What game isn't complete without a turret section nowadays?

RELEASE DATE: MAY

Duke Nukem Forever

"His ear once bit Mike Tyson"

PS3 Let's get one fact out of the way before we move on. *Duke Nukem Forever* feels old. It's only to be expected, given that the game's been in development for over 13 years, but Gearbox Software's attempts to spruce up the creaky engine with fancy effects like depth of field and motion blur aren't convincing. This is a game that looks its age, and plays it, too. AI is predictable. Gameplay is straightforward and undemanding. Duke's one liners are borderline sexist. It feels like playing a game released closer to the start of the millenium rather than 11 years in.

And yet we still like it. *Duke Nukem Forever*'s tongue is placed firmly in cheek, the self-referencing making clear that this is one game aware of its own absurdity. Take the opening of the game: Duke Nukem has spent the years since he last repelled the alien invasion living a self-indulgent life in Las Vegas. But when the aliens return and make off with the 'Holsom Twins', The King is interested in one thing only – rescuing his babes.

As well as all the shooting you'll do along the way you'll need to complete puzzles, such as powering up a computer by using a toy truck to poke a power core through a hole, and there's also a section where Duke finds himself shrunken to minuscule size, using a toy car to drive and jump miniature ramps.

From the small scale to large, we've also seen Duke take on a towering Battlelord with an RPG, finishing it off by punching it repeatedly in the testicles.

It's all ridiculous, but refreshing in that *Duke Nukem Forever* makes no apologies for its crude sense of humour. It revels in it. And you know what? The game may not feel original or fresh, but it does feel very different to the countless *Call Of Duty* imitators, and for that it deserves at least the benefit of our doubt.

Duke Nukem Forever is being developed by Gearbox Software. For more information head to **www.dukenukem.com**

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME GREAT?

- You can wee in urinals which is always a lot of fun.
- You can punch alien giants in the nuts.
- It's got a sense of humour and doesn't take itself too seriously.
- "Hail to the King, baby."

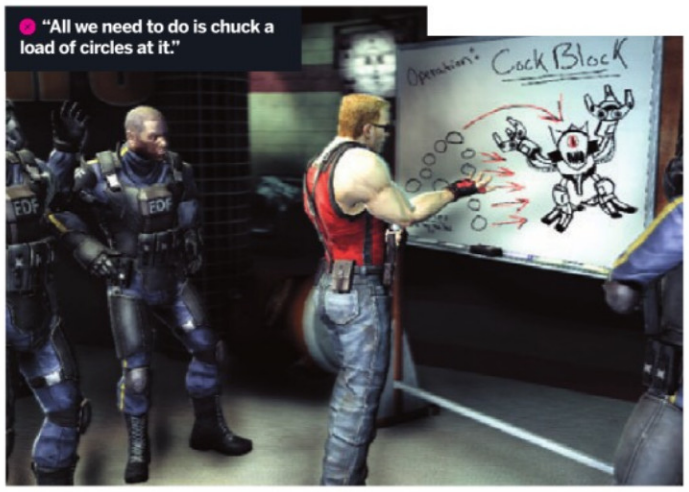
READ ME

***Duke Nukem Forever* is basically the game that D3 Publisher's *Eat Lead: The Return Of Matt Hazard* wanted to be but ten times better.**

PEEP SHOW

Yes, there are naked women in it

WHILE DUKE NUKEM predominantly concerns itself with shooting things, there are some distractions and jokes during the game. You can boost health by bench-pressing weights or throwing a basketball through a hoop in Duke's gym. You can also peer at naked women through an air vent, if you're that way inclined.



"All we need to do is chuck a load of circles at it."

THE LATEST ON...

The games we almost forgot about until Jon reminded us to put them in. Phew!

DUNGEON SIEGE III

Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** Obsidian
ETA: May **Format:** PS3

FRESH FROM ITS buggy escapades in *Alpha Protocol* and *New Vegas*, Obsidian is almost done knocking *Dungeon Siege III* into shape and we're quietly excited. We're afraid of being loudly excited in case there's a bug ten minutes in where your character falls through Level 4 as his skin disappears or something.

DIRT 3

Publisher: Codemasters **Developer:** Codemasters
ETA: 24 May **Format:** PS3

WE'VE GOT A release date for *DiRT 3*! And it is... 24 May. Not that exciting in itself, though Codemasters released two new screenshots to celebrate, even if we're only showing you one of them. It's half the party they wanted it to be. Still, you can guess what the other screenshot is and probably be at least 72% right.

TEKKEN TAG TOURNAMENT 2

Publisher: Namco Bandai **Developer:** Namco Bandai
ETA: TBA **Format:** PS3

MORE NEWS BEING drip-fed from the overlords at Namco Bandai HQ suggests that you can now smash players around stages *Dead Or Alive 4* style. Items have also been expanded from their gimmicky role in *Tekken 6* to include more variety and options, such as baseball bats and hammer-head hats.

METRO 2034

Publisher: THQ **Developer:** 4A Games
ETA: TBA **Format:** PS3

NOT MUCH INFO on this one yet, except THQ bigwig Danny Bilson has confirmed its existence and said it will compete with "the *Call Of Dutys*". Oh good. Hopefully that means perks, overpriced DLC and broken matchmaking. On the bright side, some game elements are now "better polished". We shall see.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: SUPER SOLDIER

Publisher: Sega **Developer:** Next Level Games
ETA: July 2011 **Format:** PS3

THOSE IN THE know have assured us that this will be the best of this summer's licensed movie-game dross. While hardly a difficult task, there's still something about *Super Soldier* that makes **Play** interested. It may be a reskinned, subpar *Arkham Asylum* but hell, between us, we'd happily play that.

CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL

Publisher: Ubisoft **Developer:** Techland
ETA: Summer **Format:** PS3

THEY SAY: 'CALL *Of Juarez: The Cartel* is an action-packed shooter game with a strong story, interesting characters and a wide variety of gameplay options. The game will bring the best elements of the Wild West into modern times with a very gritty and relevant plot'. We say: Looks stupid.

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE

Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Toys For Bob
ETA: TBC **Format:** TBC

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER reboot. This time it's everyone's favourite skateboarding dragon, Spyro. Remember when he looked like a little kiddies' cartoon character? Well, he doesn't any more. He looks 'BADASS', or something.

KEVIN VAN DAM'S BIG BASS CHALLENGE

Publisher: Zoo Games **Developer:** Zoo Games
ETA: TBC **Format:** PS3

A US-ONLY RELEASE so far hasn't dulled our enthusiasm for everyone's favourite fishing hero and his upcoming game. We haven't been able to find a review of the Wii version, but it's a 'value-focused' title, so it has to be good. Right?

THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS IN THE SKY

Publisher: Xseed Games **Developer:** Nihon Falcom Corporation
ETA: TBC (US: 29 March) **Format:** PSP

WE WOULDN'T HAVE paid much attention to this, being as it is yet another PSP RPG coming to the US after Japan (and probably not coming to Europe at all). But then, it's been released on no less than seven separate occasions since 2004. INTERESTING.

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Playing bad games so you don't have to

Including: *Hitting giant spiders with giant swords in* Dragon Age II /// *Checking out the tutus in* Two Worlds II /// *Aspiring to live like the terrible people in* TDU2

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review

94 Rango PS3

A movie tie-in for the kids

84 MotorStorm: Apocalypse PS3

Split/Second, but a few months late

92 Yakuza 4 PS3

So good (kind of) we reviewed it twice!

review panel

Luke Albigés

Reviewed:
The 3rd Birthday

Luke, when asked what he'd been up to recently, began an enthusiastic outburst the likes of which we've never seen before. In it, he explained he had been carefully positioning Pokémon stickers on a recent issue of **games™**, much to his, and the team's, delight. We were assured by one Peter Gothard, also of **games™**, that it was indeed 'more fun than you'd think'. We later learned Luke had actually been doing nothing all month aside from playing *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* religiously. As such, it turns out we can't take a word he says at face value.

currently playing:
Marvel Vs Capcom 3

Mat Hoddy

Reviewed:
Two Worlds II

When you go to a new face to find out what they've been doing recently, it doesn't exactly fill the bones with confidence when they look up at you, let out a slight, sly grin and say: "I had to peel my snake." Fortunately for us we had actually imagined this sly grin and it turns out Matt was actually not speaking in any kind of euphemistic fashion. Far from it – in fact he was being what they call 'literal'. His elderly corn snake is no longer capable of shedding herself, so needed a bit of help getting out of the old robes. Bless.

currently playing:
Two Worlds II

Chris McMahon

Reviewed:
Bulletstorm, MotorStorm: Apocalypse, Ar Tonelico Qoga: Knell Of Ar Ciel

It's fast approaching a point where Chris needs an intervention. Recounting the things he did last month, there's a definite pattern that disgusts and scares us. We fear for him. We hope he'll be okay, but we're worried. As such we'll put it here where he's sure to read it: Chris – we care about you and we want you to be alright. So, hard as it is to ask you this, we just have to: please try to stop being Scouse. The endless drinking and debauchery? Fine. The Merseysider accent? *Sickening.*

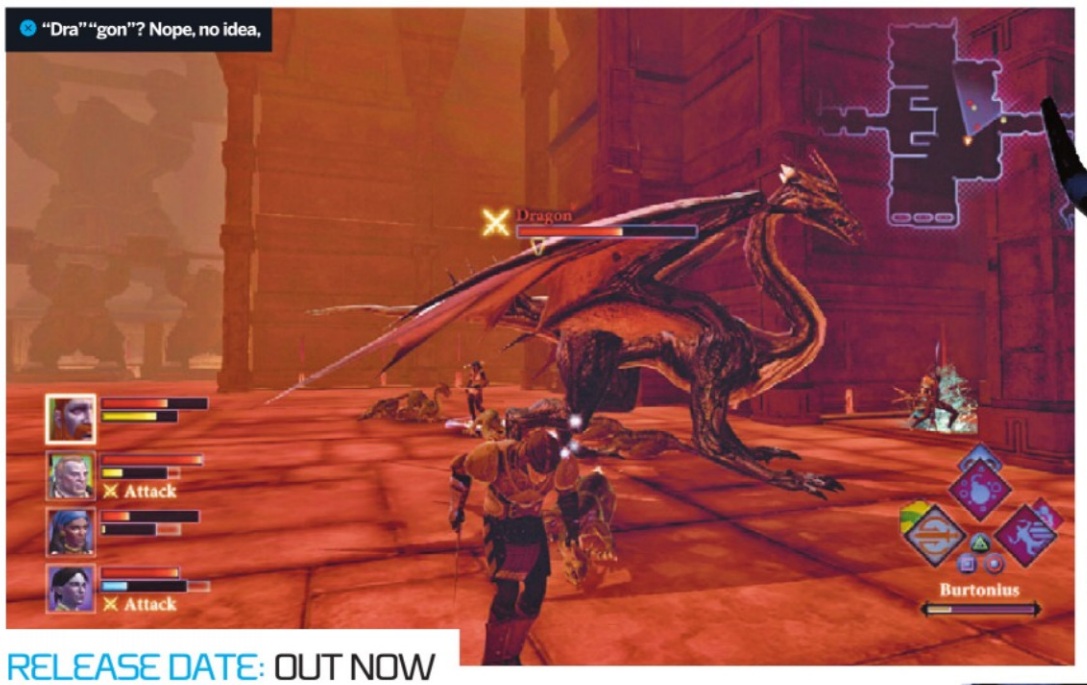
currently playing:
Dead Space 2

Ian Dransfield

Reviewed:
Dragon Age II, Test Drive Unlimited 2

Ian has spent the last month, like the Six Million Dollar Man before him, being rebuilt – faster, smarter, stronger and less whiny. So far he's failed on every count, but there's hope that things will be sorted in the future and we will be left with the real chunk of awesomeosity we all know we deserve. Alas, for now we have to stick with a chunky (slightly less – check out Fitness Quest IX!), aggressive, square-headed berk with a rubbish beard and awful hair. We hate you, Dransfield. (Written by Ian Dransfield, 2011)

currently playing:
Killzone 3



RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dragon Age II

But will it be all the Dragon (r)Age?

DETAILS

Publisher
EA
Developer
BioWare
Price
£49.99
Players
1
Genre
Role-playing game
Supports
720p, Downloadable content, DualShock 3, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
18
Web site
www.dragonage.bioware.com/da2

PS3 Picture the scene: you've settled down in the office to get cracking on BioWare's new RPG. You've already been playing a while and you've enjoyed it so far – you find the experience to be rather tranquil (those familiar with the ins and outs of the series: forgive the pun) and thoroughly absorbing, and have been looking forward to playing again ever since the last time you turned the PS3 off. Then somebody from the office comes over to take a look, commenting that it doesn't look very nice. Then another lollops over and states the animation is just as bad as before. Then yet another walking carcass stumbles over to spout his or her opinion at the back of your head, informing you that they don't like dungeons, dragons, swords *or* sorcery. Picture this going on for hours on end, on and off through the day – and throughout the remaining days it takes to play through the game.

You've just pictured the *Dragon Age II* reviewing process. You've also just pictured a collection of standard, go-to criticisms of the game that just don't hold up when you've sank dozens of hours into BioWare's latest epic. Though that's not to say our wholesome, beautiful and all-round thoroughly wonderful officemates are wrong in their assertions – but more on that later. There are issues, niggles, things that should have been ironed out from before and a general feeling that this is an old-fashioned RPG, but there's also a deep, involving and engaging game that can thoroughly envelop your life – or at least around 40 hours of it – if you're prepared to give it half a chance.

Those returning to the *Dragon Age* series will see changes – beyond the visuals – immediately. Combat is now far more responsive, with a press of the attack button equating to an attack from your character. No longer is it a case of ordering your controlee what to do and only half paying attention to what's going on. But that's not to say it's simpler – not by any means. Players are still able, if not expected, to issue orders to their four-character party, as well as pause during combat to change instructions on the fly. It's still not as well handled as on the PC, with fiddly targeting holding effectiveness back, but it is a strategic element of the game you will have to master to make any progress. Unless you're playing on easy. Pansy. Whereas before your character's skills and powers became something only the AI used unless you actually remembered to press your buttons, the immediacy and involvement in the combat this time around almost *forces* you to use every power at your disposal.

It's not just in the combat that BioWare has managed to simplify while at the same time keeping things just as complex as they were before. Old features haven't been dropped, aside from the 'sit back and relax' combat of old. Rather, things have been added to, with extra little features here and there to make the game more welcoming to the newcomer, or to those not so well-versed in the stat-heavy world of RPGs. The best example of this is a star rating for weapons, armour and accessories, which acts as a quick reference guide so players are able to weigh up whether a particular item is worth equipping or not. Two stars? It's alright. Five stars? PUT THAT HELMET ON. At the same time, everything retains the deep statistics and numerical values we would all expect from a game from such a stable, so rather than just putting any old five-star gloves on, you can specifically choose the ones that offer four per cent defence against frost magic. We're not even joking here. In a world where developers often take things too far in a quest to open their

> Dragon Age II is something you can definitely lose weeks – months – to

Or you could try **Two Worlds II** Issue 203
Unlike *DAII*, this doesn't quite rescue itself from technical issues. **64%**

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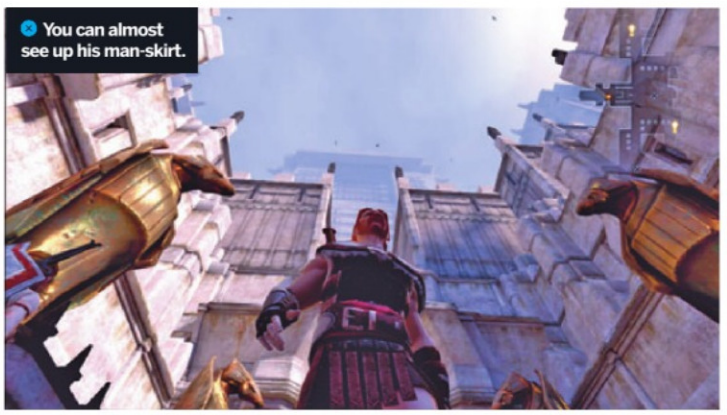
Your mum, yesterday.


You can almost see up his man-skirt.

games up to a wider audience, BioWare has popped up and done it quietly, and done it well.

It's safe to say there's been no skimping on content. From the outset – at least beyond the intro – there is a wealth of missions available to main character Hawke. Your overall goal immediately falls to the back of the mind as dozens of main missions, side missions, rumours, companion missions and other missions turn up to waste your time/help you spend your time productively (depending on how you look at it). It could actually be said that it's overwhelming initially, but you can soon get into a rhythm, each task is clearly marked and easy to find so it never really becomes too much. Soon enough you're settled in, and before you know it eight hours has passed, you haven't washed and you're beginning to resemble every single RPG-nerd stereotype you've ever heard/repeated in polite company. It's a dangerous cycle, though not one we'd ever bother avoiding – it can become a mite addictive, beating up Dwarves*.

The setting – the overall atmosphere – of *DAII* is something that's been discussed a lot prior to release. BioWare itself has spoken of maturity in the game, and endorsed a 'grown-up' approach to the story, its characters and setting. What that seems to translate to is a lot more blood and gore, with enemies >

Button-mashing won't get you past this goit.

Conversation wheels evoke *Mass Effect*.

OH, WAIT – THE STORY!

Because there's one of those in it, too

DRAGON AGE II sees players taking control of Hawke – male or female, but always human protagonist of the tale as they try to avoid disaster in the city of Kirkwall, away from the original setting of Ferelden.

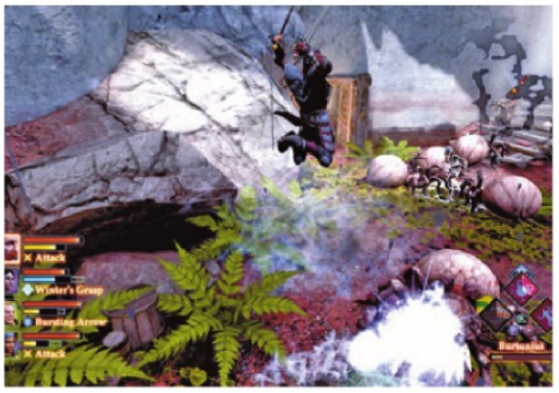
That's about all we can tell you without ruining everything, though. We do so hate spoilers.

There are obvious tropes on show, like how you'll know the Qunari are an honourable warrior race before they even open their mouths. But there's still more than enough in the established lore to keep your interest, and the ongoing treatment of mages is as captivating as ever,

Ranged classes can be controlled, if you're scared of spiders.

Pause, instruct, cast, strategise – it's all still in there.

The brothel: every adventurer's spiritual home.



> exploding in showers of giblets to a far greater degree than they did in the original game, along with a bit more swearing – out of place in a fantasy realm, maybe, but not as jarring as we initially felt it to be, and female characters with cleavage-revealing armour and gigantic bosoms. In other words, it's the kind of videogame maturity we always expected. And you know what? We're not going to rip on it. It's sometimes misjudged, it's sometimes ham-fisted, but it works, it knows its audience and, well – Isabela is our new favourite person. (She's not real, Ian – Ed)

While the game is far better looking than the original, what with it *not* having all the visual flair of 2005, it isn't all roses. True, textures and all of that gubbins people seem to really care about have been improved to the point where sometimes things do look genuinely impressive. Plus there's the fantastic architectural design on show in most of the areas you travel through/make your home in – a point which rarely seems to be noticed, at least as far as we've... noticed. It looks a lot better than the original and we're sure you'll think that from the screens shown on this page it does indeed look, as the kids say, 'good'. But then, just as with the original, it all falls down when you see it in motion.

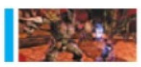
> BioWare has managed to simplify while at the same time keeping things just as complex

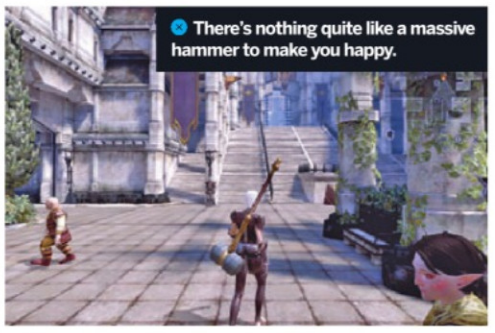
Robotic, stilted animation ruins any effect that might be felt in cut-scenes; emotion is lacking where emotion should very much be present; and generally speaking it all just feels like a light coating of paint ("slightly better graphics") on a smelly old wall ("pasted over existing, not-as-good graphics"). But does it ruin the experience? Does it bring *Dragon Age II* down in any real way, beyond the superficial? Does it balls.

This is in part thanks to the voice acting, which while still suffering similar problems to the original game – sentences feel disjointed from one another and conversations often feel like the characters aren't actually talking to each other – is often really quite good, especially when it comes to the male version of Hawke. You hear a lot of chatter throughout *Dragon Age II* so it's good to know there isn't too much to complain about, and it no longer sounds ridiculous when the Dwarves say 'sod'.

Our main issue with the game, though, was an odd one. The world itself is reduced in size from the original game – before you would travel throughout Ferelden on your quest, whereas this time you spend the vast majority of your time in one city – Kirkwall – and only go out into the surrounding Free Marches for a dozen or so missions. While it by no means makes things smaller than last time out, things

Elves aren't above comedy Hulk Hogan poses.

In this series

Dragon Age Issue 186
More slightly broken and more old-fashioned. We still liked it, though. **82%**



There's nothing quite like a massive hammer to make you happy.

What the hell is that? Some kind of bus?

can't help but feel a bit claustrophobic and enclosed. There's sense of progression in the fact the game takes place over the span of a decade, but there's less sense that you're actually *going* anywhere as the story makes its way. Even if before it was only the illusion of exploration, of freedom, this time around it's the illusion of being imprisoned in just one city. As said, it is an odd thing to take issue with, but when you enter your 23rd hour of play and realise you're just going back to the city you spent the first 20 hours in, the over familiarity becomes harmful to the experience. Don't spit in our faces and exile us from your homes, but we have to say it: it actually becomes a little bit *boring*. Only a smidge, though, and it's nowhere near enough a dose of boredom to stimulate your I-hate-this-game gland.

If you have any interest in RPGs and can forgive certain elements like looks, *Dragon Age II* is something you can definitely lose weeks – months – to. As mentioned, it's deep and fulfilling; more rewarding than the first game; simpler, yet still retaining the complexity we'd hope for from a role-playing game. It's still resolutely old-fashioned and if you dare to play it then you must accept the fact that many onlookers won't be impressed with the glass-eyed robots talking about dragons and runes, but you know what? Sod them. We're pro-fun, not anti-everything, and we can't do anything but recommend *Dragon Age II* as a result.

Ian Dransfield

VERDICT

An improvement over the original, but still suffering technical issues and is decidedly old-fashioned in many regards. Still, *DAII* is a deep and involving experience, sure to eat up a huge chunk of your spare time.

86%

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

Find the two differences to win a prize (there is no prize)

VARRIC, NARRATOR OF the story in *Dragon Age II*, is unreliable. How unreliable? Well let's see – one/two shots is from the untrue 'before' version of his story, the others from his true 'after' version. Any differences you can see?

Hopefully that's a real throne, not a euphemistic one.

*NB **Play** does not advocate the beating up of Dwarves. Just Leprechauns. Because they're gits.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Bulletstorm

This game is so @£#&?$!@ good

PS3 "If you don't like this, then we can expect a future of just military shooters and nothing else." These are the words of one Cliff Bleszinski, addressing an assorted group of journalists preparing to play *Bulletstorm* for the first time.

The sentiment is obvious. People Can Fly and Epic Games don't want *Bulletstorm* to be just another shooter. They want it to be an antidote. They want it to reinvigorate an industry fixated on realistic war simulations and corridor shooter gameplay. They want *Bulletstorm* to be a volley of multicoloured paintballs on a target that's become lifeless, grey and over-reliant on ideas that have long since grown old.

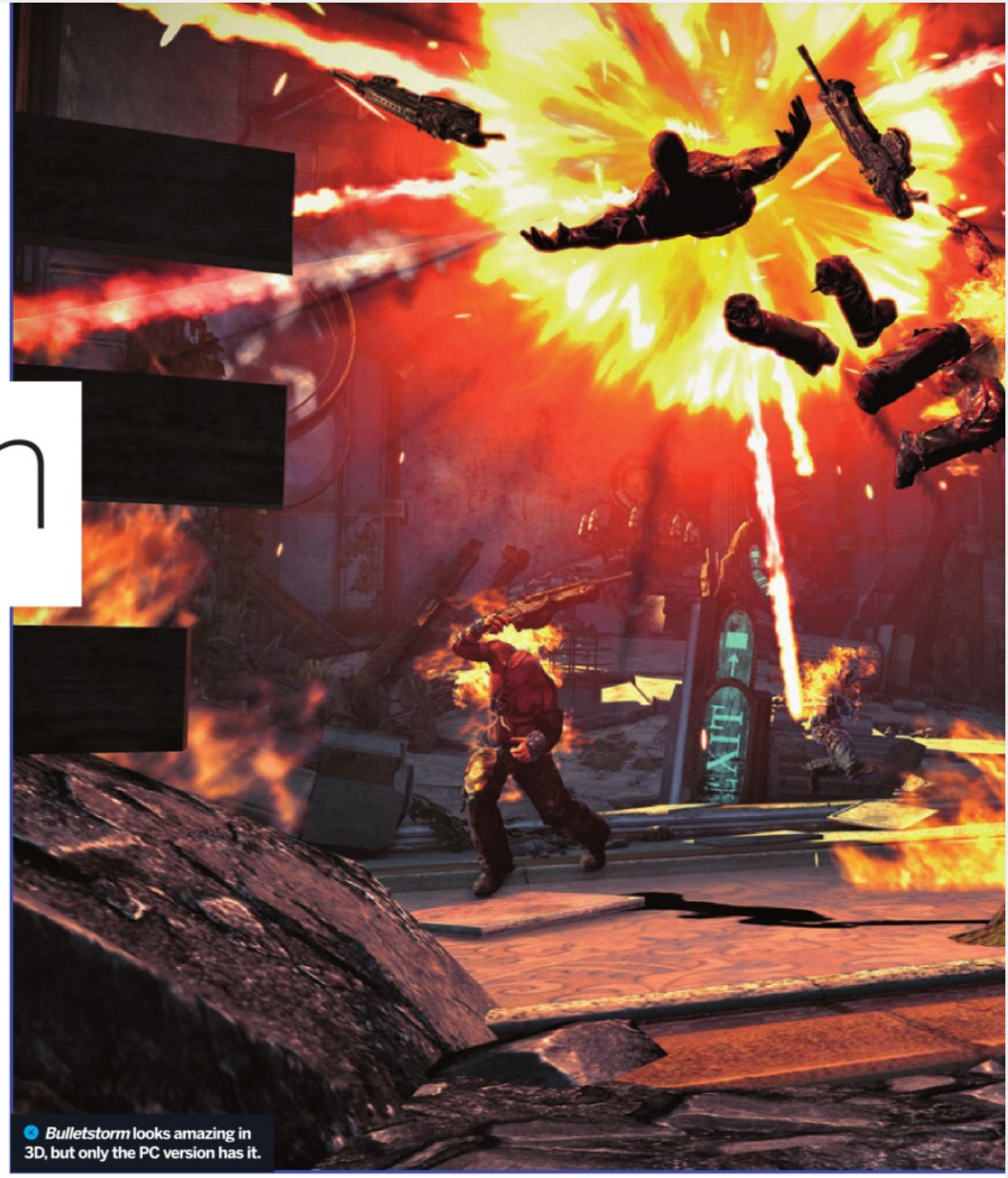
Following Bleszinski's speech, we sat down for nine hours and played *Bulletstorm* through to its end, and we're happy to announce that People Can Fly and Epic have a good chance of attaining that goal. The two companies wanted to inject a little colour into a genre that's become somewhat inert, and you don't get much more colourful than a game in which one character calls another "puke dick".

But it's not the inventive swearing; the watercolour landscapes of Elysium; or the pulp sci-fi narrative that truly distinguish *Bulletstorm* from the gunmetal greys of *Call Of Duty* (but more on that later). No, the thing that sticks after finishing a playthrough of *Bulletstorm* is that it has one thing every other FPS feels lacking these days. *Bulletstorm* has real, tangible *gameplay*.

Okay, all games have gameplay, but *Bulletstorm* is one of the first FPSs in a while that makes it feel like you're doing more than trudging through trenches and repeating that cycle of shoot, advance, watch cut-scene. Here you're decapitating, electrocuting, defenestrating, amputating, castrating – and if you're skilful you can do all of these at once.

DETAILS

Publisher
Electronic Arts
Developer
People Can Fly
Release Date
Out Now
Price
£49.99
Players
1-4
Genre
FPS
Supports
1080p, 1080i, 720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, Sixaxis, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
18
Website
www.bulletstorm.com



Bulletstorm looks amazing in 3D, but only the PC version has it.

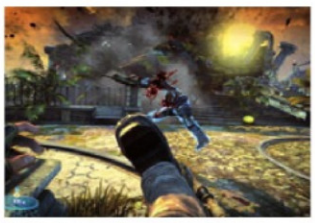
Your abilities are ostensibly simple. You can carry three weapons at a time, you can kick enemies into the air with a heavy kick from your boot, or you can use your Leash to lasso enemies towards you. By far the most satisfying move is the slide, which causes the gruff, drunken protagonist Grayson Hunt to scrape across the floor with zero inertia. Using any of these melee moves punts enemies into the air and puts them into a slo-mo, anti-gravity state, at which point it's time to get a bit more inventive with your killing.

> Bulletstorm's later battles demonstrate just how freeform and beautifully anarchic its firefights can be

The scenery is full of traps, you see, but they're not there for you. Cacti, barbed-wire fences, explosive barrels, lashing electrical wires, man-eating plants, ditches bubbling with toxic waste and many more environmental hazards are there to provide options for you when it comes to choosing where you'd like to place your foe once you've got them in the air. But even before you've kicked, leashed or shot them you have choices: explosive hot-dog carts can be booted towards enemies and blown up, or you can take advantage of Elysium's

RAINING DOWN THE PAIN

The enemy's going down in a hail of bullets



BOOT: Your trusty boot. It has no alternate fire (because boots can't shoot) but you can slide across the floor at a rapid speed. There are few experiences in *Bulletstorm* more satisfying than kicking an enemy into a meat grinder.

LEASH: The Leash is one of the most important items in your armoury, allowing you to get foes within feet of you in seconds. Its 'Thumper' mode lets you launch enemies high into the air – very useful in rooms with low ceilings.

PEACEMAKER CARBINE: The PeaceMaker Carbine is your standard assault rifle. Until you activate the secondary fire mode, that is. Doing so fires one very powerful shot that can take down multiple enemies at once.

SCREAMER: The Screamer is a small pistol that hides a dangerous secret. Its secondary fire mode launches a powerful flare that can ignite enemies and others close to them. It packs a far greater punch than you might initially expect.

BONE DUSTER: The Bone Duster is a shotgun with four barrels, meaning you can use it to blast enemies' legs off. Its alternate fire can shoot through cover, the Bone Duster heating its bullets so they melt the skin off of enemies.

Or you could try

Killzone 3 Issue 202
Less inventive, but a chunky, solid and entertaining game nevertheless. **80%**

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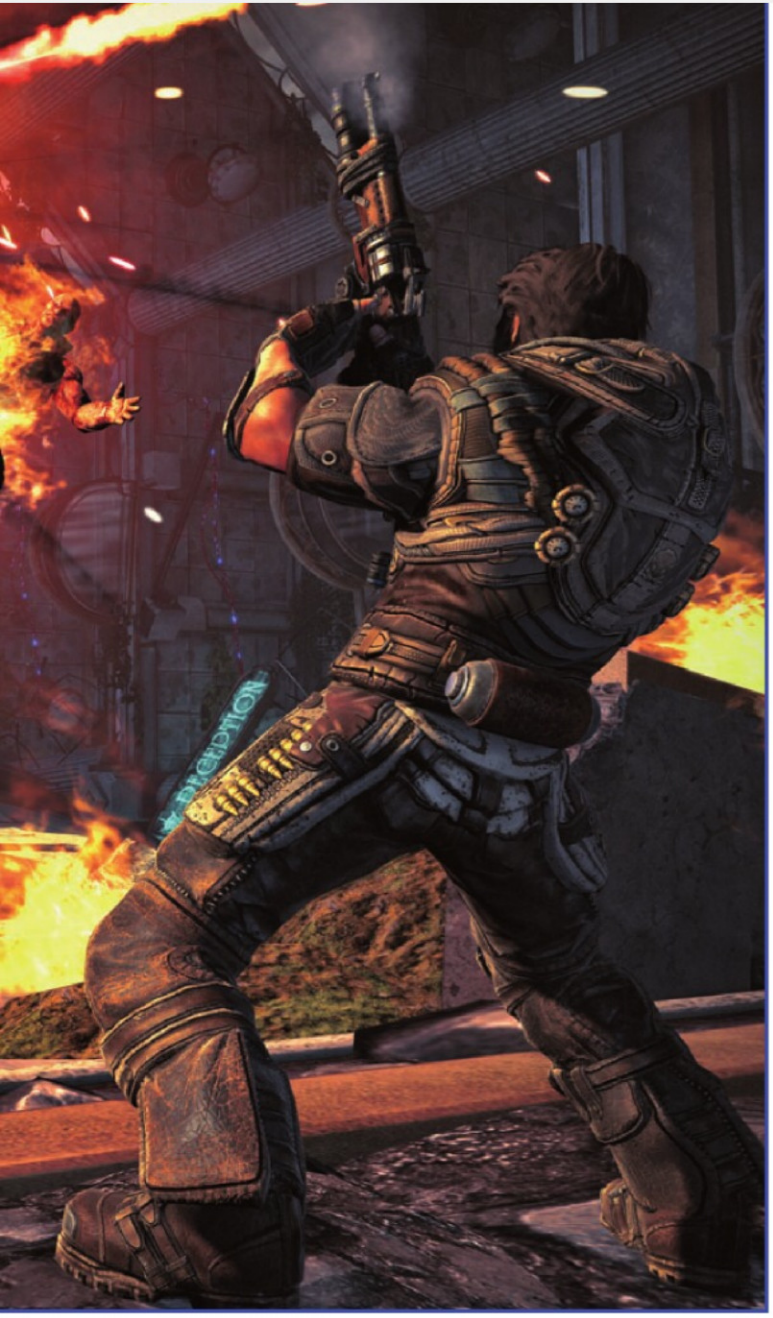


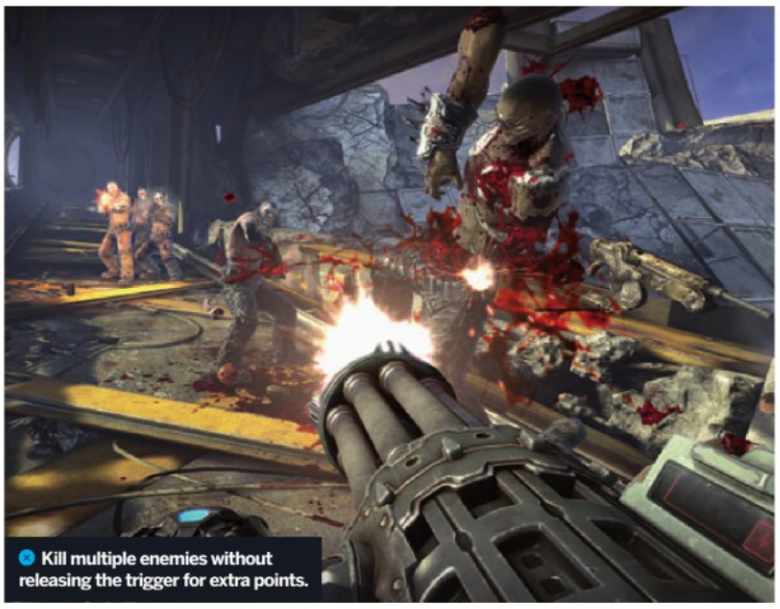
Bulletstorm is violent, but Fox News's claims remain absurd.

exotic fauna. Fluorescent Nom parasites can be launched onto enemy heads, or noxious spores can be burst, their yellow-green gasses confusing foes into attacking one another.

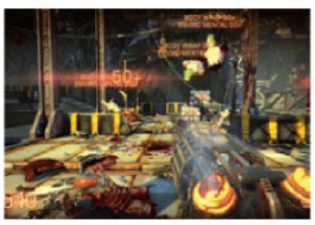
It's all delivered with the same chunky, satisfying sense of feedback that characterises *Killzone* and *Gears Of War*. Melee moves are delivered with a gratifying thud and weapons chug rather than pop. And, like the bullet-sponge Helghast in *Killzone 3*, *Bulletstorm*'s ammo-resilient enemies are also beneficial to the game in that they demand players are skilled at more than just aiming down the iron sights. You need to be creative with your killing.

The Skillshot system keeps the game from becoming a back-and-forth of bullets. There are 131 in total, unlocked as you uncover new environmental hazards and buy and upgrade weapons. 'Enviro-mental', for instance, is rewarded for using explosives to kill enemies, while 'Graffiti' will be given for splatting an enemy against a wall with a powerful blast – or, as we discovered, by crushing them between a kicked crate and the wall behind.

The Skillshot system isn't totally free of criticism. Many feel like trophy awards rather than real incentives to kill creatively and rack up the points. Killing a swarm of Electroflies, for instance, isn't exactly riveting fun. The same is true of the more complex Skillshots like 'First In, Last Out'. This Skillshot demands you start a combo on one enemy, kill another, then return to the first and finish him off. These kind of manoeuvres are too fiddly to intentionally pull off during the chaos of combat, meaning you might try for them once – or more likely, >

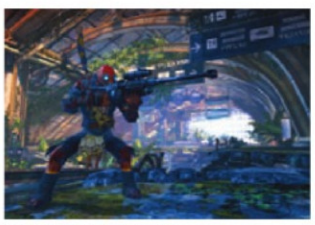


Kill multiple enemies without releasing the trigger for extra points.

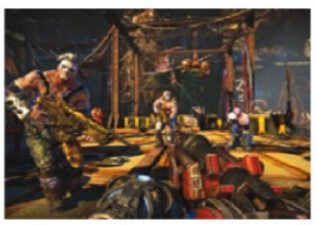


FLAIL GUN: The Flail Gun's primary fire shoots two grenades that are attached by a chain, which you then remotely detonate. Secondary fire ignites the chain, making it a searing blade that can cut enemies in half.

BOUNCER: When using the Bouncer, holding down the fire button launches a cannonball that will bounce around levels until you let go. Alternate fire causes the ball to bounce in one place, exploding each time it hits the floor.

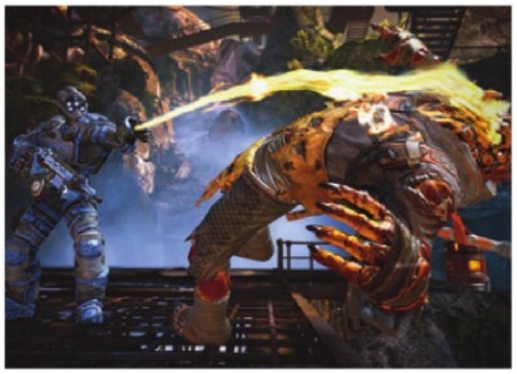


HEADHUNTER: The Headhunter may seem like a regular sniper rifle, but most don't allow you to alter the course of your bullet. Its secondary fire lets you shoot an enemy, move their body through the air, then detonate it like a bomb.

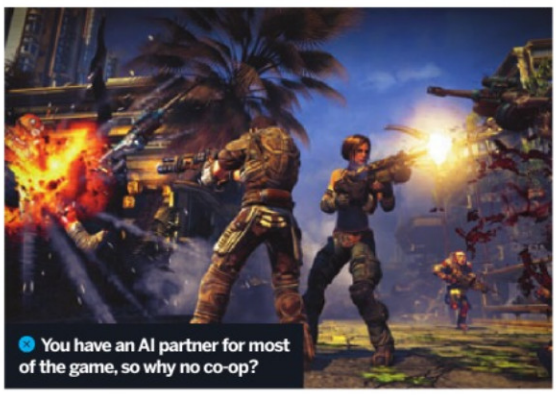


PENETRATOR: Fires a huge spear at enemies, sticking them to the wall. With secondary fire, after the spear lodges into your enemy, you can choose a new direction for it, giving you a chance to achieve better Skillshots and more points.

CHAINGUN: Chainguns are found every few levels in *Bulletstorm*, however, they can only be used for a limited amount of time before their battery runs out. They can mow down enemies like no other weapon, though.



Using environmental hazards to your advantage is a must.



You have an AI partner for most of the game, so why no co-op?

> achieve them by accident – and then forget about them for the rest of the game.

But these issues far from ruin the experience. There still remain plenty of Skillshots that you can combo together during even the most hectic of battles, and as you learn each throughout you'll be compelled to play the game more resourcefully – or perhaps just drink alcohol prior to combat to get the 'Intoxicated' Skillshot – to be awarded more points which can then be spent in 'Dropshops' on new weapons and upgrades. It's an immensely rewarding and addictive feedback loop – you want to play better, to earn more points, to buy more ammunition, to play even better still. That's game design 101 right there.

Given this focus on creative combat, the weapons have to be versatile themselves, and on this front People Can Fly has truly delivered. Even traditional FPS weapons like the shotgun are altered to get the most bang for your buck, sporting four chambers instead of the usual two. Then there's the javelin gun, a weapon appearing in every other game these days, except here you're firing five-inch-wide railroad spikes. Then there are the less conventional weapons, like a weapon that fires bouncy cannonballs and a sniper rifle that lets you alter the trajectory of the bullet. Each has a powerful alternate fire mode that unlocks further Skillshots. Take the Flail Gun, for instance. Usually it fires two grenades attached by a chain, but when Overcharge is activated the chain heats up, becoming capable of cutting flesh like a hot knife through butter.

> In Bulletstorm you're doing more than just trudging through trenches

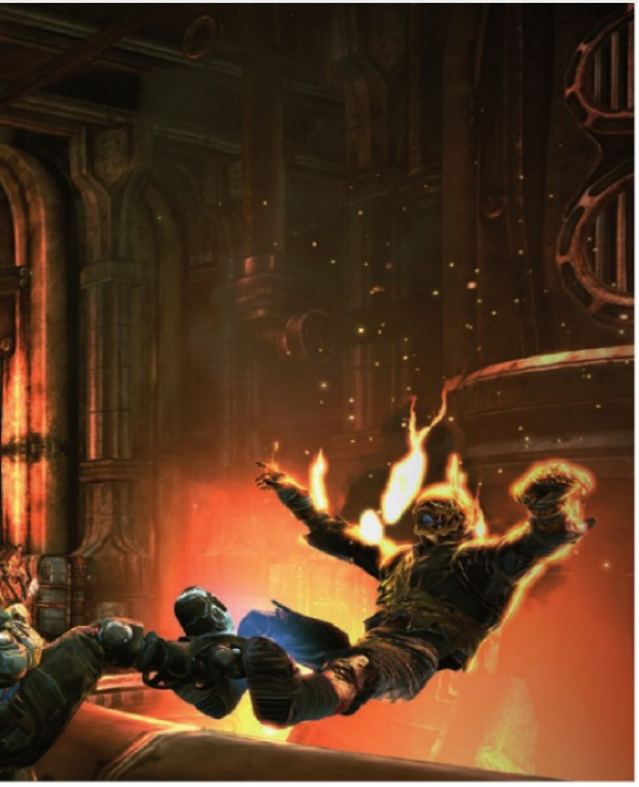
These alternate fire modes, combined with the melee and environmental attacks, make for a frenzied, varied and gratifying shooter that keeps players involved from the start of the game right the way through to its end. You could critique the repetitiveness of Skillshots like 'Bullet Kick', 'Voodoo Doll' and 'Vertigo' for being too easily spammed, but if you rely on such easy moves to overcome encounters then you've only got yourself to blame. *Bulletstorm*'s later battles – where dozens of enemies will pile into one room – demonstrate just how freeform and delightfully anarchic its firefights can be.

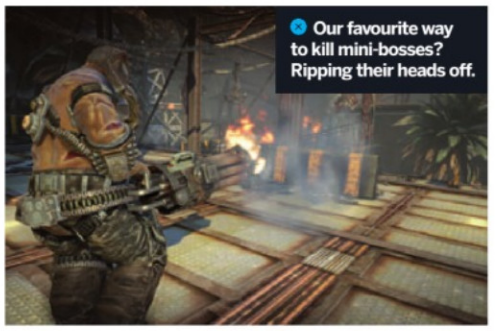
As for the backdrop to the combat, holiday resort-turned-warzone Elysium is a beautiful location, although maybe not quite as attractive as we remember from previous demos. During the review some of the Unreal Engine's flaws became apparent, such as issues with texture pop-in and jaggy edges. However, *Bulletstorm* remains an attractive game, the Unreal Engine's vastly improved Lightmass illumination giving the world a solidity to match the combat.

There's plenty of variety, too. Much of Elysium recalls *Enslaved*'s post-apocalyptic rendering of America: all crumbling architecture and towering city blocks, but overtaken by nature of the most colourful variety – blues, reds, yellows, oranges and more blossoming in every corner of the screen. It brings to mind *Gears*' 'destroyed beauty', with holographic clock faces and other technology being slowly overtaken by neglect and nature.

Previously... in Play

PREVIEWED Issue 200
"Rather than turn out to be Giant Space Marines Violently Dismembering Generic Enemies, *Bulletstorm* is that, but With Gusto, Character, And A Sense Of Humour."



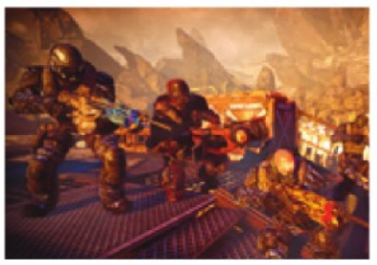


Our favourite way to kill mini-bosses? Ripping their heads off.

Bulletstorm's 'vehicle section' is like no other you've seen.

BRINGING ORDER TO ANARCHY

Bulletstorm's extra modes are short-lived, but entertaining



THERE ARE TWO extra modes in *Bulletstorm*: Echoes and Anarchy. Echoes allows you to replay sections of the single-player as an unbroken attack run, with the aim to get the most points possible. Anarchy is the game's only multiplayer mode – a Horde-esque four-player co-op game but with a twist: it's all about scoring points rather than surviving. To complete waves you must achieve a set number of points, and to do so you *need* to work together to perform team Skillshots. If you act as a lone wolf, your team won't progress. It left us wondering, why isn't there any co-op in the campaign?

The characters themselves are less worthy of such beautifully descriptive prose, given that they're about as graceful and refined as taking a poo with your trousers on. Grayson Hunt is a booze-guzzling rogue with the mouth of a drunken sailor, but he's got nothing on antagonist General Sarrano, who utters such phrases as, "suck the tears off my #$£@ you ugly mud-&%$£#!" and "£!?#-@#$%&#-&%$-job-piece-of-£!?%" (sorry, got to keep the mag family friendly). It really is some of the most inventive swearing we've heard. Is it immature and puerile? Yes. Does it detract from what is otherwise a great game? No. More importantly, will it, as Fox News reported, turn us all into sexual deviants? Don't be silly now.

Bulletstorm is just a good game that doesn't take itself too seriously, and doesn't mind taking a jab at itself. Towards the end there is something of a misguided stab at morality, General Sarrano questioning Hunt's willingness to kill hundreds of men, but in a game where you're shooting men in the testicles and kicking their heads off, raising such a topic seems ridiculous. Perhaps it's all part of the joke.

It hardly matters. The game is entertaining until the end, offering up plenty of surprises and set pieces that will definitely appease those gamers looking for some large-scale apocalyptic spectacle, and the combat never gets tedious. *Bulletstorm* is a game that makes you feel as if you're actually *playing*, rather than simply advancing, and the fact it maintains this sensation from beginning to end is commendable indeed. It's certainly a more enjoyable experience than *Killzone 3*, a game whose reliance on older FPS clichés prevents it from providing the same kind of thunderous experience that *Bulletstorm* manages to deliver so effortlessly.

So, pay heed to Bleszinski's words. If *Bulletstorm* is ignored then we'll see fewer titles like this in the future, and more copycat titles simply imitating the market leader. That would be a very great shame indeed.

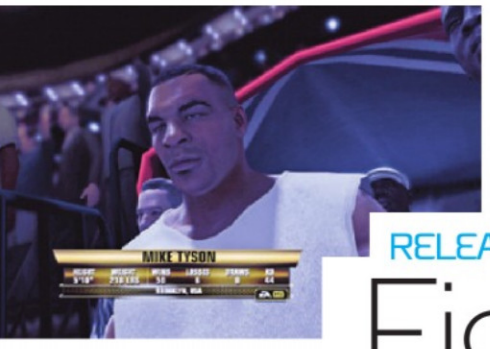
Chris McMahon

VERDICT

***Bulletstorm* is an inventive FPS with a sense of humour. Buy it and let the games industry know that this is the kind of imagination we want from our games, not just another *Call Of Duty*.**

86%

The in-game camera allows boxers a wider viewing angle than previously.



RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Fight Night Champion

EA's heavy hitter comes out swinging

DETAILS

Publisher
EA Sports
Developer
EA Canada
Price
£49.99
Players
1-2
Genre
Sports
Supports
1080p, 1080i, 720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, Sixaxis, DualShock 3, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
16
Web site
www.ea.com/fight-night

PS3 But a few short months ago, we can recall viewing Peter Moore's ideas on the continued trajectory of his EA Sports (ugh) brand with a healthy dose of suspicion. After Be A Pro and Ultimate Team strands, the world was told, narrative would next be strained into place, like a sort of conceptual Jenga. Frankly, the whole idea seemed about as far-fetched at the time as us ourselves stepping into the boxing ring complete with flamboyant sequined trunks. After all, what was to eventually come of it all? The covering up of extra-marital affairs? Inventing efficient grills? Or, perhaps, the worst option of all: recording product-placed advertisements as an accountant somewhere literally exploded with joy. Whatever the case, we remained sceptical about theories that looked set to either trivialise our gaming or dilute the fun that could be squeezed from it. The trouble with all of this largely far-fetched speculation, other than the obvious, is that *Fight Night Champion* – the point at which such grand statements start to bear fruit – has reignited our expectations of what a sports title can deliver. Take that, the man.

> What's to come of this? The covering up of extra-marital affairs? Inventing efficient grills?

You see, alongside the type of fight, train, fight career mode featured throughout pugilistic videogaming since the PlayStation logo first came into existence lies Champion mode. Herein lies a purely narrative-driven boxing experience following hero Andre Bishop's incarceration and eventual redemption through the medium of punching someone in the face a bit. Training, naturally, is kept to an absolute minimum, with character development failing to feature at all. Well, that of a type that features numbers, and the condition known as 'levelling up'. In their stead feature Bishop's vastly experienced yet potentially past-it coach Gus, love interest-cum-manager Megan and an arch-nemesis whose surname is actually Frost. That Oscar's in the post, yeah? Between each five-minute cut-scene, featuring about as much plot development as a bankrupt timeshare yet intelligent employment of the series' ESPN collaboration, comes a series of fights that would elsewhere be classified rather miscellaneously as 'scenario'. Put simply, Bishop will endure perhaps the most dramatic careers of all time as judges are paid off by corrupt promoters, he breaks a hand mid-fight and is forced to dismiss multiple opponents in quick succession. Not all at once, sadly. Consequently, players will be set an objective for each bout that, though undeniably contrived and occasionally downright unreasonable, at least forces players out of their counter-punch-to-the-noggin safety blanket. Therefore it's a simple matter indeed to ignore the slight illogicality of being required to knock a fighter down two times or more, instead focusing on

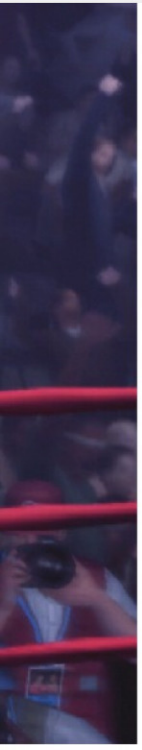
PRISON RULES

Gentlemen, I want an appalling, unsportsmanlike fight...

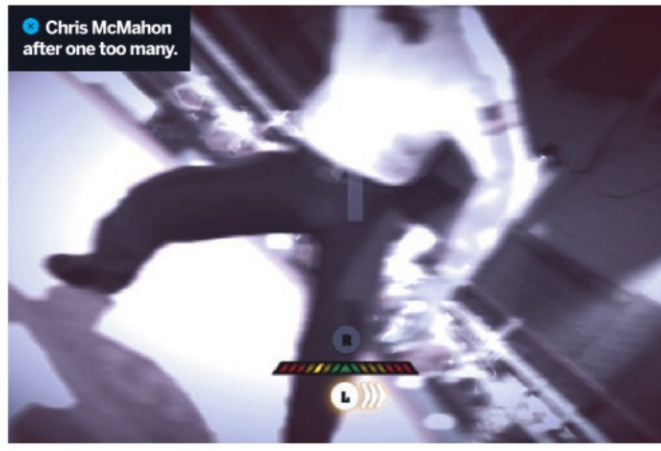
FIGHT NIGHT CHAMPION enriches the gaming universe by allowing players to fight within the walls of a penitentiary, whatever one of those is. Besides offering old-school, bare-knuckle boxing, it's notable for offering the rare thrill of hitting opponents in a sensitive area in order to deliver a more telling right hook. You know, like every maverick detective you've ever watched does. Sadly, though, boxers' vulnerability doesn't seem to have been altered in any way to reflect the increased likelihood of doing either your hands or your opponent's head more critical damage with such blows, even though single-hit knockouts feature quite prominently elsewhere.

In this series

Fight Night Round 4 Issue 181
Polished to a fine sheen, *Fight Night Round 4* had the dazzle but missed out on impact. **84%**

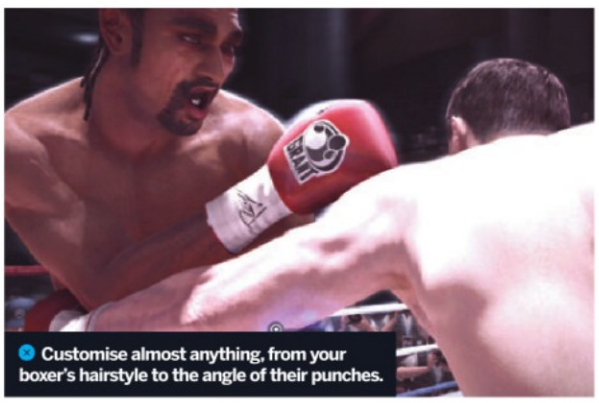


More single-shot knockouts feature, leading to unimpressive and vaguely comical replays, such as this one here.



Chris McMahon after one too many.

Naturally, the only sane course of action when confronted with a character customisation screen is to pit a 6'8" giant against a man of 5'6"...



Customise almost anything, from your boxer's hairstyle to the angle of their punches.

how engrossing the experience will mature as scriptwriters manage to tie disparate sections of gameplay together with more elegance. So much so that the ability to strike opponents in their unmentionables without being disqualified will barely register. Though targeting a first Mature rating for the series does bring some rather childish fringe benefits such as that above, it does seem rather cowardly to include what could be seen as race-related violence within your narrative without framing it a little more meatily. Grossing out your audience and swearing a lot shouldn't really be a primary motivation for the production of an 18-rated videogame, after all.

EA Canada has seen considerable success this time around, however, in attempting to reconcile the clearly delineated yet staccato mechanics of *Fight Night Round 3* with its smoother yet less punishing sequel. This has largely been achieved via on-the-surface, insignificant tweaks to how each avatar blocks incoming blows. Switching more punishing blows to a shoulder button modifier allows the chance to counterattack more swiftly and, crucially, directly from a defensive position. Basic blows require only a tap of the analogue stick in a particular direction, as opposed to a gesture; the happy side effect being more nuanced attack directions, running from uppercuts at one end to attempts to nail opponents into the ground feet first, at the other. What's more, players must choose between holding up their guard for sustained periods of time – which can lead to punches eventually slipping through – or attempting to block at just the right moment to earn that crucial pocket of time in which their fellow fighter can't respond. This system proves remarkably well balanced, offering players neither outright security or the chance to simply spam their shoulder button in hope of securing a lucky perfect block. The reason being that punches of various reach ensure that dodging away or towards an opponent can prove just as valuable as addressing a punch with your own fists.

Excellent gameplay revisions aside, though, *Fight Night Champion* proves as impressive as a template as it does a standalone experience. Once EA loses the McBoxer and perhaps mixes a few branching role-playing elements into proceedings, the future of sports titles may very well be sealed. Just let us take part in the scandals, too, okay?

Dave Shaw

VERDICT

Improving vastly upon *Fight Night Round 3*'s compartmentalised battles while retaining its sequel's silky-smooth animation, *Champion* is a triumph. The future possibilities of narrative gaming only could excite us more.

88%

Previously... in Play

PREVIEWED Issue 200
"A fair few elements have been changed, tweaked or otherwise mixed up, justifying the longer wait."

RPGs are apparently the only chink in Goliath's armour.

RELEASE DATE: 18 MARCH

Homefront

Get yourself a new Korea

DETAILS

Publisher
THQ
Developer
Kaos Studios
Price
£49.99
Players
1-32
Genre
First-person shooter
Supports
720p, PlayStation Network, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
15
Website
www.homefront-game.com

PS3 From the moment it begins *Homefront* sets out to show that it's different. Playing as helicopter pilot Robert Jacobs we find ourselves arrested by the Greater Korean Republic state police and thrown onto a bus to a labour camp.

As the bus heads towards its destination Kaos Studios' bold vision of an America occupied by a unified Korean force is revealed in all its austerity. We see US citizens forced into cages; others having bags forced over their heads; some tied and hanging like meat in an abattoir – it's imagery starkly reminiscent of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

And it only gets worse – further down the road two adults are forced into a corner at gunpoint. "Close your eyes baby, don't look!" says the woman to her child, who watches on as Korean soldiers execute his parents. The cries of the orphan as he runs over to his deceased parents echo longer and more deeply than anything seen in a *Call Of Duty* game.

And this is what *Homefront* has going for it – a world that feels very different to that which we've become accustomed to from the FPS. Sure, we've seen this before – *Modern Warfare 2* saw the Russians invade the US, Infinity Ward juxtaposing mid-western American iconography with all-out conflict. But although *Homefront* also has plenty of shoot-outs occurring in Wendy's restaurants and abandoned uptown housing estates, it explores the concept of a subjugated America from a far more personal angle, examining the impact of such an event on the populace as well as the landscape. You'll see football stadiums that have been converted into cramped, ramshackle prison camps; orphaned children struggling to eke out a new existence in squalid shanty towns; mass graves into which hundreds of executed Americans are poured by bulldozers. It's a harrowing, frightening sight.

So, *Homefront*'s different then. Special, right? Well, perhaps not. The setting may be a brave and unusual choice, but the game within it is hardly what we'd call original. Anyone who's played *Call Of Duty* will recognise the control scheme button for button, and it's not the only thing Kaos has borrowed from the franchise. Sniper sections recall All Ghillied Up; an infrared bombing raid is ripped off from Death From Above; and a helicopter section isn't hugely dissimilar from that played in *Black Ops*.

We're not going to be hugely critical of the decision to borrow ideas from Activision's money maker – what game doesn't these days? However, such comparisons only make *Homefront* look worse in contrast – it looks and plays like *Call Of Duty* without the polish.

Ideas that are *Homefront*'s own aren't particularly exciting. Take the Goliath – an automated and high-powered armoured vehicle that occasionally joins you in a fight. You can select targets for it using a pair of binoculars, but it somehow feels less fun than just shooting down your iron sights. Several times during the game you'll also need to take down tall turrets by flanking and then chucking a grenade at them from behind. Surely there was some way to make this repeated action feel a little more involving – or at least, making the very action of throwing a grenade feel more physical. In *Homefront* it feels more like Jacobs is shooting his grenades in a straight line rather than lobbing them in an arc.

> Despite the repetitive combat, Homefront still feels worth playing

Homefront is at its best when the action had subsided, and Kaos explores the world it has created. Being shown around a hidden refugee camp where children run and play freely in a sun-dappled garden is a particular highlight, as is one section where you sneak into a KPA prison camp. But the game's reliance on combat – particularly towards the end of the game – is ultimately its downfall. Well, that coupled with the paucity of the campaign, which clocks in at a measly five hours.

At least Kaos has its multiplayer to fall back on; a cleverly designed online experience built on years of watching how players act and are motivated by points and progression. *Homefront*'s multiplayer matches are spacious, pacey affairs, with the Battle Points and Battle Commander system (see boxout) ensuring that players always have an objective to complete and are being sufficiently rewarded in doing so.

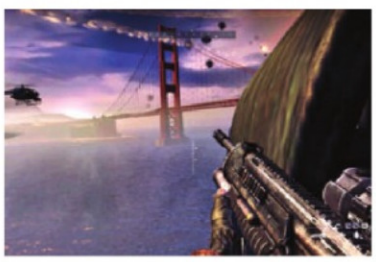
Technically, the multiplayer can be a bit shaky due to the large scale of the warfare, with 32

MAKING A POINT

Kaos Studios commandeers the online shooter

HOMEFRONT'S MULTIPLAYER introduces two elements that direct the flow of each skirmish. The first is Battle Points – awarded for playing well you can use these to buy vehicles or weapons. Do you want to save up for the powerful helicopters, or spend it on smaller equipment like drones?

The other intriguing addition is Battle Commander. In Battle Commander an AI monitors each side and their opponents, identifying threats as the match progresses and giving players a more focused goal. It's the kind of innovation we wouldn't mind seeing in the next *Call Of Duty*.



Or you could try

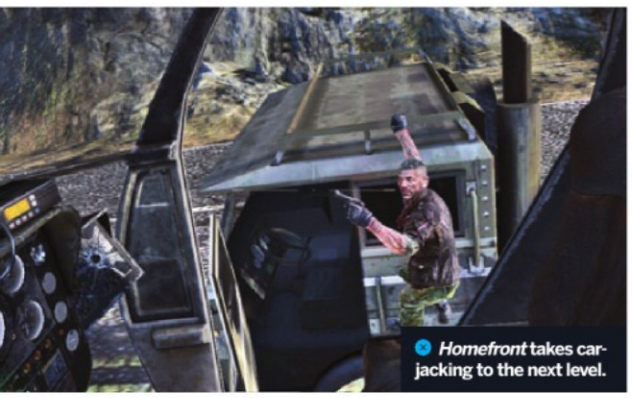
Medal Of Honor Issue 198
EA's reboot of the *Medal Of Honor* series was a hit with **Play**, but multiplayer had a heavy supporting role in that. **86%**

www.imagineshop.co.uk

Steal the petrol tankers by shooting the hell out of their escort. Anyone see the flaw in this plan?

Target acquired: the Goliath lines up an APC in its sights.

Seems like an appropriate cue for some classic rock... oh wait. There it is.


Homefront takes car-jacking to the next level.

players able to compete on some of the biggest maps we've seen. But nevertheless it remains a shrewdly conceived mode that's more than worth a couple of weeks of play at least.

Homefront's saving grace is its multiplayer, because with a campaign this short it would otherwise look like a far less desirable package. But the campaign is still involving, its world original, and despite the repetitive combat and poor enemy AI it still feels worth playing. It's not the best shooter we've experienced, but the ways in which it dares to be different make it worthy of a look, at least.

Chris McMahon

It was him. He blocked the toilet.

Alternatively, you could just send the Goliath in and be done with it.

VERDICT

There are better shooters available, and the impressive writing credit of John Milius isn't readily apparent in the campaign's short length. But *Homefront*'s still an entertaining, if not a little under-polished, FPS that dares to strike out in new directions.

69%

No one is going to stand in the way of Robert Jacob's next foot massage.

Previously... in Play

PREVIEWED Issue 201
"It plays on our fears of loss of control and instability with a single-player campaign that's not entirely unimaginable."

Here you see an entire shelf of city blocks collapsing. There's no effect on gameplay, though.

Previously passable routes are often closed off on later laps.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

We love the smell of burnt rubber in the morning

DETAILS

Publisher
Sony
Developer
Evolution Studios
Price
£49.99
Players
1-16
Genre
Racing
Supports
1080i, 720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, Sixaxis, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
16
Website
www.motorstorm.com

PS3 Here's a question. Would our opinion of *MotorStorm: Apocalypse* be any different if *Split/Second* hadn't sped across the finishing line first? Has our opinion of *MotorStorm*'s toppling skyscrapers and crumbling city blocks been tainted by the fine execution of Black Rock's explosive racing?

It's difficult to know for sure. If we hadn't played *Split/Second*, *MotorStorm*'s USP of a racecourse being torn up as you compete for first place would have felt entirely more original. But we *have* played *Split/Second*, and it's impossible not to draw comparisons between it and *MotorStorm* when playing the latter and watching an aeroplane crash ahead of your vehicle. Unfortunately, that comparison is not always flattering.

Apocalypse does at least live up to its name, its track deformation far larger in scale and more complementary to the game's panoramic views than *Split/Second*'s. Most of *Split/Second*'s destruction occurred up close and personal, but much of *MotorStorm*'s occurs in the near distance. Skyscrapers might buckle under the tremors of an earthquake; entire sections of tarmac could collapse from under your wheels; or gargantuan chunks of scenery can fall in on itself, hundreds of skyscrapers grasping like arms from the bowels of hell as they sink underground.

It's impressive stuff, visually. In terms of the actual effect on the pacing and flux of a race it's not quite as remarkable. As mentioned, most of these screen-shuddering effects occur ahead, the track collapsing and buckling long before you reach the new route or cavity that's just opened up.

There are exceptions – one track in the city's financial district sees huge masses of road crack and rise directly in your path, while one race by the coast is ravaged by a tornado that whips the air into a frenzy and, at one point, throws a Ferris wheel across the track. The final race, fought against a PMC helicopter that barrages the tarmac with missiles as you drive, is absolutely terrific, and it's this kind of stuff we hoped to see more of in the game. But regrettably these events are just that – exceptions. Most of the time the effects are just cosmetic; pretty explosions or blocks of landscape that handily fall into place just before you reach a gap. For the most part *Apocalypse* feels less like surviving by the skin of your teeth and more like racing through a heavily scripted set piece.

> Split/Second was a hard act to follow, and Apocalypse feels like a lesser beast

NARRATIVE DRIVEN

Does MotorStorm really need a story?

HERE'S AN INTERESTING fact about *Apocalypse*. It's a racer with a non-linear narrative. The Festival takes place over two days, with each difficulty level (given a human face by the rookie Mash, the expert Tyler and the veteran Big Dog) jumping back to the start, meaning when you return to a track it will be in a different state of destruction than previously seen. The story of the Festival is told through cartoons, in which the characters look like cardboard cutouts and bounce around the screen as if they were hand puppets. These cut-scenes don't distract from the experience of playing, but the characters and dialogue are ridiculous at best, irritating at worst.

Sometimes you'll get pedestrians hitching a ride on your vehicle.

Or you could try **Split/Second: Velocity** Issue 192
A more tactical and exhilarating execution of the concept. **90%**

www.imagineshop.co.uk

MotorStorm: Apocalypse

We imagine *MotorStorm* looks great in 3D. It's a pity we didn't get to sample it.

This level features the *Cloverfield* monster. Not really, but that would be cool.

Unfortunately, *MotorStorm*'s not as good-looking as its rivals.

The track can fall away from under you at any moment.

Compared to the risk/reward gameplay of *Split/Second*, in which you triggered these events yourself, *Apocalypse*'s automatically triggered explosions are often little more than set dressing. This is a game about spectacle and fun, rather than the tactical route selection that characterised our time in Monument Valley and that lush Pacific island. It's as if the new focus on showmanship distracted Evolution from delivering on the driving that made the previous *MotorStorm* games so entertaining.

But before we get overly critical, let us point out that *Apocalypse* is still an entirely enjoyable racer. The concrete and tar of the new city setting has invited several new vehicle classes to join the food chain – superbikes, supercars, minis and muscle cars. These new additions make *Apocalypse* arguably the fastest and busiest *MotorStorm* yet, and also the most challenging. The Festival doesn't allow you to pick your own vehicle, meaning you're going to have to master each car, truck, buggy and bike on some very varied topography.

But *MotorStorm*'s rarely faltered when it comes to variety. The problems here are more greatly linked to design, namely, the obvious rubber-banding on the more difficult races. Each plays out in the same manner every time – no matter how hard you try you won't be able to reach the top three positions until at least the last or penultimate lap. And even then, it's hard to stay there.

Opponents in heavier vehicles will often crash into you from behind, which can occur completely out of the blue. It's an incredibly irritating occurrence, particularly when you're seconds away from finishing a race. It engenders the feeling that later races are won only by luck – on that one attempt when the AI doesn't appear out of nowhere and bully you off course.

The entire experience simply doesn't feel as thick with the tactile crunchiness, instant decision making, and neck-and-neck racing that made the previous games so distinct. After all's said and done *Apocalypse*'s USP feels like a novelty – it certainly makes the game *look* exciting, but detracts from the racing sensation we've come to love from previous entries in the series.

And that's the problem. *Split/Second* was a hard act to follow, and in comparison *Apocalypse* feels like a lesser beast. In answer to our original question; if *MotorStorm*'s fourth outing had come first then yes, it may have been more impressive. But Evolution's distraction from the core driving experience would be just as tangible nevertheless.

Chris McMahon

VERDICT

***Apocalypse*'s racing feels like it's received less attention than creating spectacle, but the focus on track deformation is exhilarating and fun nevertheless.**

76%

In this series

MotorStorm: Pacific Rift Issue 172
The focus on racing makes this a better, more balanced, racer. **93%**

You can steal whatever you want, then break it down and reuse the bits.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Two Worlds II

Reality Pump, Nil

DETAILS

Publisher
TopWare
Developer
Reality Pump
Price
£39.99
Players
1-8
Genre
RPG
Supports
720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
16
Website
www.twoworlds2.com

PS3 What chance does a middling RPG like *Two Worlds II* have in the current climate? Arriving as it does in the barren month between two BioWare juggernauts, Reality Pump has delivered a sprawling checklist of strange design decisions and technical inadequacies, which pales beside the best of its genre. Nonetheless, the Polish developer also brings plenty of original ideas to its generic fantasy landscape, and, as a result, *Two Worlds II* eventually proves a great deal more enjoyable than seems possible throughout its opening hours, rewarding the patient gamer with a surprisingly rich fetch/kill adventure.

Indeed, for any OCD role-players who thrive on micromanagement, the level of customisation will stand as a high point of *Two Worlds II*. There is very little in the world of Antaloor that can't be tweaked or improved upon in some way, while almost every inventory item can be salvaged into its constituent parts, before being used to augment something else. As well as almost negating the need to visit shops, it enables a method of quick upgrading that can often give you an edge in battle, and avoid the grinding that befalls so many games of its ilk. Additionally, the potion-brewing and spell-building systems, though poorly explained at the start of the game, prove through experimentation to be interesting, worthwhile additions – though combined with the speedy levelling up *Two Worlds II* throws at you, it does mean that a fair percentage of time is spent staring at inanimate screens and dicking around in menus rather than achieving anything.

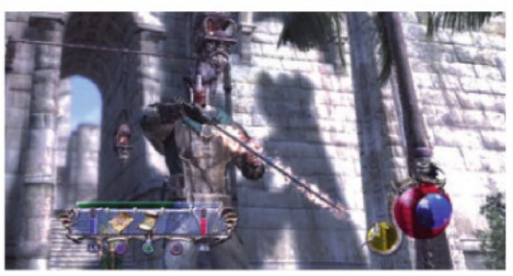
The frustrations just go on and on, and every one stands as a barrier to enjoyment

There's something unapologetically old-fashioned about the approach *Two Worlds II* takes, which will make it as many friends as enemies in an era where the role-playing game is losing much of its nerdy charm in favour of quick-fix action streamlining. However, any olde-worldy appeal it might carry in its favour has so many hurdles to overcome that it's pretty difficult to imagine it being truly loved by players. Why do the game's characters emote like *Team America*, and why do they continually step on each other's audio cues like some awful GCSE production of *Lord Of The Rings*? Why are crouch, run and manual aim all located on L2? And who thought it would be a good idea to map jumping onto the same button as every context-sensitive action in the game? The frustrations just go on and on, and every one stands as a barrier to enjoyment that ensures *Two Worlds II* will never make good on the ambitions that have shaped it.

Mat Hoddy

The graphics suffer from some poor textures, heavy pop-in and a depth of focus that keeps pulling into vaseline-o-scope.

Combat has surprising scope, based on close-quarters, ranged or magical attacks.



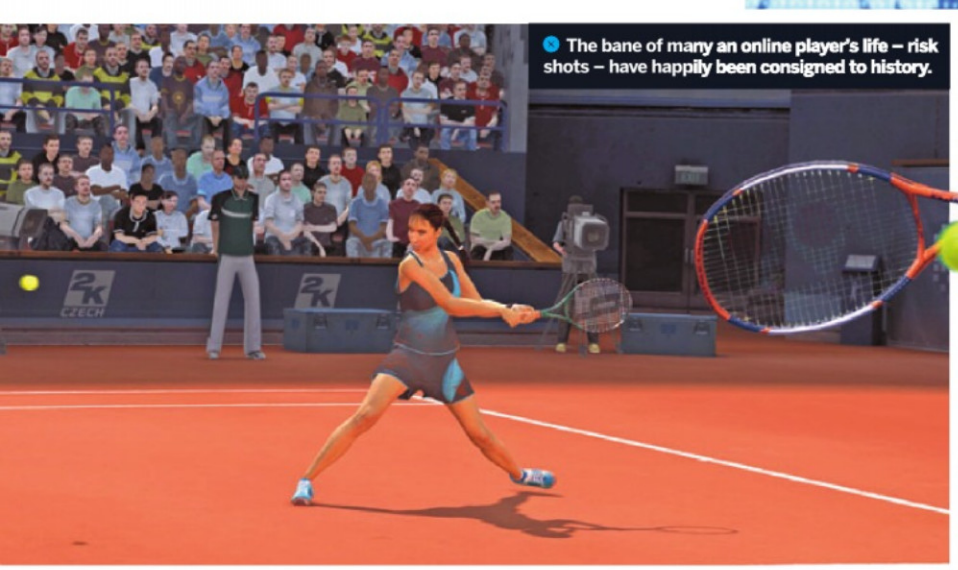
VERDICT

It's not a disaster by any means, however, *Two Worlds II* is a bit of a technical mess, and no amount of innovation can hide the fact that Reality Pump's game requires its players to be apologists as well as adventurers.

64%

In this series

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion Issue 153
Similar worlds, but an all-round better package. **91%**


The bane of many an online player's life – risk shots – have happily been consigned to history.

PlayStation Move matches allow for multiple shot types.

RELEASE DATE: 18 MARCH

Top Spin 4

2K Sports seeks safety in numbers...

DETAILS

Publisher
2K Sports
Developer
2K Czech
Price
£49.99
Players
1-4
Genre
Sports
Supports
1080p, 1080i, 720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, Sixaxis, DualShock 3, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
3
Website
www.2ksports.com/games/topspin4

PS3 Picture the scene: you're accompanying a horde of seasoned warriors into battle across the arid tundra, armed with an array of magical spells boasting mastery over fire and ice. Spying a particularly Neanderthal grunt, one mighty heave of a sword is unleashed to rid it from this mortal coil. After a stroke that clearly misses its target, the foe stumbles backwards, employing death animation #3 to exaggeratedly breathe his last. "Oh well," you might reason, "pinpoint accuracy isn't central to role playing". When that leading character is exchanged for Roger Federer brandishing a tennis racquet, though, matters quickly start to turn awry. And not just because long hair can get caught in your level four flail.

2K Czech's initial theory appears sound. Taking an assumption that all tennis players approach the sport using three distinct stratagems – offensive baseline, defensive baseline or serve and volley – player customisation invites players to strengthen these segments repeatedly, and not individual statistics. Taking advantage of coach perks awarded for achievements, the theory goes that players' styles will evolve more organically, producing matches that can be controlled in markedly different ways. On this count at least it has succeeded; demanding a masterful (if staccato) appreciation of where opponents might least wish to receive the ball, besides how players themselves might wish to strike it.

Sadly, though, the spreadsheet of numerical values dictating play remains painfully transparent throughout, manipulating play behind the scenes in a fashion not unlike *Pro Evo*. Tugging unseen strings, it'll cause one identically mistimed lob to exit the stadium while its twin clings to life. It'll make opponents assume failure animations the very instant a winner is struck, causing them to comically mourn a ball not yet lost. Worst of all, it'll leave gamers celebrating their good fortune time and again as a button press slightly to either side of the sweet zone sees their shot guided accurately by mere numbers. Sure, that occasional 'accidental' racquet edge may lend proceedings a dose of realism, but at what cost? Couple the above with a career mode so dull and lacking in variety you could pave roads with it, plus PlayStation Move functionality that merely exchanges waggling with a traditional shot button, and you've the recipe for a tennis title recommended only to those who like their sports titles so realistic they never actually play any.

The spreadsheet of numerical values remains painfully transparent

Dave Shaw

Take advantage of various coach perks to help your player evolve their playing style.

VERDICT

Mired in mathematics to almost a role-playing degree, *Top Spin 4* proves as transparent as it is meticulous. Action is tactically deep, yet ultimately staccato.

60%

Or you could try

Virtua Tennis 3 Issue 150
Sega's wacky yin to 2K Sports' yang. Also, it's significantly better... **91%**

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The 3rd Birthday

Day of the tentacle

Replaying old stages isn't just a way to improve your grade. Experience and Over Energy parts can also be earned by reliving former glories.

DETAILS

Publisher
Square Enix
Developer
In-House
Price
£29.99
Players
1
Genre Action RPG
Supports
N/A
Age Rating
18
Web site
www.the3rdbirthdaygame.com

PSP If *The 3rd Birthday* is anything to go by, it's now officially okay for games to make absolutely no sense. A storyline forged from purest nonsense, Aya Brea's less-than-timely return sees giant tentacles, time travel, possession and partial nudity coexist in something so confusing that it doesn't even feel like it was created with human understanding in mind. But while it might not make any sense to anyone ever, few could deny that this festival of gibberish doesn't allow for some incredible set pieces and a genuinely unique action RPG experience. Don't try to work out what the hell is going on and the two of you should get along just fine.

What initially seems like a pretty standard third-person shooter quickly does away with the conventional by introducing Overdive, the ability to possess nearby soldiers and continue each firefight in their shoes. More than simply being a way to fill your health bar when near death, success is utterly reliant on clever tactical use of this ability. Quickly zipping into each available ally in order to set up cover fire or flanking attacks can set you up for an easier ride, while some grunts carry unique weapons that might help you out in a pinch – these can usually be bought for Aya's personal arsenal between missions since somehow, three of her four weapon slots are her own tools that she gets to take into each new host. Overdive can also be used to trigger an explosion from within staggered enemies for crazy damage. It looks awesome, sure, but it's also an invaluable weapon.

Aya's clothes tear as she takes damage. from her!

Under the hood, there are some pretty complex RPG mechanics at work and both Aya's own level and her proficiency with each weapon class improve as you battle the seemingly unending army of Twisted. The strangest part, however, is the Over Energy system, where DNA samples from defeated enemies are slotted into a grid to enhance various abilities. It starts out simple enough but as you begin to merge strands to create upgraded versions – or altogether new ones – you can lose hours looking for the best setup. There's seemingly no rhyme or reason to the by-products of your clumsy science, meaning it's often best to just keep trying a combination until it eventually spits out a favourable result, at which point you confirm it and move onto the next strand. Yes, it's daft but the results for those willing to repeatedly re-roll outcomes are well worth the minimal effort.

Solid gunplay meets an oddly compelling (if rather lazy) RPG aspect, then, and the end result is a thoroughly entertaining and deceptively tricky shooter with all the production values you've come to expect from a Square Enix game. And giant tentacles.

Luke Albigés

Bosses are everywhere but even normal enemies are no pushover. Many have several stacks of life bars for you to burn before they go down.

VERDICT

Its unique mechanics take some getting used to but once you get into the swing of it, *The 3rd Birthday* cements itself as one of the PSP's most original titles. A harsh difficulty curve might put some players off, though.

80%

In this series

Parasite Eve II Issue 66
Aya's last outing was over a decade ago, though it still wasn't as good as the original. **89%**

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

de Blob 2

When Dulux simply isn't enough

DETAILS

Publisher
THQ
Developer
Blue Tongue
Price
£39.99
Players
1-2
Genre
Platform
Supports
720p, DualShock 3, PlayStation Move
Rating
3
Website
www.deblob.com

PS3 We wouldn't be surprised if a majority of PlayStation 3 owners gave the original *de Blob* a wide berth. Only available as a Wii exclusive, it does look like yet another slice of casual dross from a distance, although critics actually garnered it with a great deal of praise at the time of its launch. It's understandable then, that *de Blob 2* has branched out into the multiformat arena.

The world is in upheaval after the notorious Comrade Black, fresh from defeat at the hands of Blob in the original game, has run amok, bleaching all of the colour out of the land and making everyone really miserable. It's up to the artistically adept Blob and his robot pal Pinky to restore it to its former glory.

Your aim is to race against the clock to liberate each corrupted world. Completing objectives, such as smashing Comrade Black's statues, painting houses and saving citizens will reward you with more time. You can paint objects by rolling Blob through ink pools, geysers or spray machines to change his colour. Dipping him in ink makes him bigger and lets you knock down enemies, blocked paths and other obstructions. Pinky can also be controlled by a second player to provide support with her blaster, which adds an element of chaos to the mix.

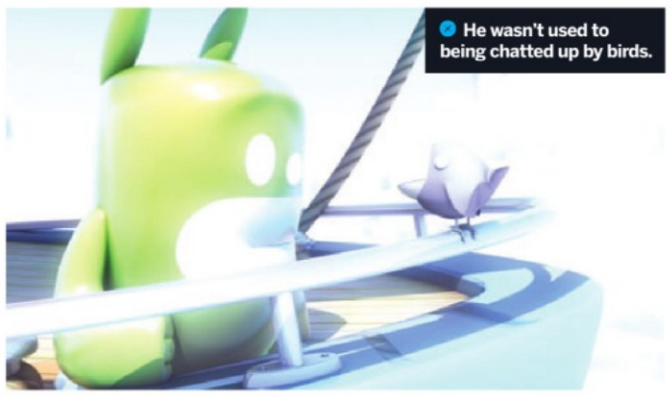
> There's a basic platforming premise at play underneath de Blob 2's charm

Making sure Blob is the right size for each task is part of the challenge, although, while it's a tad simple and repetitive at the outset, it's only when objects need painting a very specific colour that challenges start to get tough. As Blob paints everything he touches instantly, you really need to plan your designs carefully to make sure you get the colour scheme right.

Painting objects is a simple mechanic that sees a drab area with minimal music eventually erupt into a flourish of colour, vibrant visuals and an uplifting musical score. Kids will absolutely love it, even if adults are likely to find it a tad simplistic. There's a basic platforming premise at play underneath *de Blob 2*'s charm, but it's the artistic spin that really helps the game to stand out from the pack.

It's just a shame then, that after a few worlds of repeating the same process of painting objects and liberating worlds, a sharp sense of familiarity comes into play. Those captured by the allure of the game's aesthetic appeal will likely see it through to the end, while those who demand *Mario*-esque levels of platforming finesse will lose interest by the second third.

Dave Cook



VERDICT

Few studios make unique platformers today, so kudos to Blue Tongue. *de Blob 2* may well get its hooks in you, but while it's perfect for kids and parents, mature platform fans will be left wanting.

65%

Or you could try

LittleBigPlanet 2 Issue 201
Creationism on a grander scale; this is an essential purchase. **96%**

It's fun, but not as exciting as *Hot Pursuit* or as accurate as *GT5*.

Exploration leads to... whatever the hell this is.

Driving 15 miles to your next event isn't actually that much fun.

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Test Drive Unlimited 2

DETAILS

Publisher
Atari
Developer
Eden Games
Price
£49.99
Players
1-32
Genre
Racing/MMO
Supports
1080p, 720p, PlayStation Network, Downloadable content, DualShock 3, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
12
Website
www.testdriveunlimited2.com

Test Drive 2 Unlimited? No, no (no-no, no, no)

PS3 If you are the kind of person who sees anything aspirational about the bunch of lifeless Ken and Barbie dolls that make up the cast of *Test Drive Unlimited 2* then you are a very bad person. We're not one to make judgements on the character of people we've never met, but in this case we're willing to make an exception. But then, at least you didn't design these awful, glass-eyed mannequins. If you had, you'd be responsible for some of the most vapid, materialistic and all-around terrible representations of humanity we've ever seen. We do hope that maybe it's all just a clever satire. But it's doubtful. Just look at the car wash logo for proof (clue: it is breasts).

So there we go – the story and lifestyle aspect of *TDU2* isn't its strongest point. It's actually one of the weakest points of any game ever made, and goes so far that it negatively impacts the game as a whole. Still, there is some racing, some driving and some scenery-admiring to be done and this is where things aren't too bad. It isn't the best racing experience on PS3, but it's a decent *driving* game.

Handling is an oddity, with the game seemingly unsure as to how realistic it wants to be. Generally, things are a bit on the heavy side with cars sticking to tracks, but often – and without much warning – your car will become a doughnut-tracing mofo of the highest order. It's functional though, and once you get used to its quirks it's easy enough to enjoy your driving time. Also, while racing on dirt feels oddly stiff, there's no doubting the satisfaction felt when transitioning between different surface types. Sorry, didn't mean to get too sexy with our phrasing there.

The range of challenges and amount of *crap* to collect (what with the game being a wild advertisement for Buying Stuff You Don't Need) means *if* it hooks you, *TDU2* will keep you playing. But there's a serious question of whether or not it will actually be able to get its claws into you in the first place.

> The most vapid, materialistic and all-around terrible representations of humanity we have ever seen

TDU2, when played alone, isn't something we would heartily recommend. It has lures and can be a fun escape at times, but it's just not the best experience out there and there are some... *questionable* decisions about tone and content that are likely to colour judgement of the game. Basically, if you like *Jersey Shore*, you'll probably get on with this.

Ian Dransfield

And we quote: "It's all just a bit budget, isn't it?"

Buy a sofa!

VERDICT

A bad choice of stylistic direction doesn't completely ruin what is a competent experience offline – hard as it tries. Check out page 96 for our online review.

62%

Or you could try

Gran Turismo 5 Issue 200
Not directly comparable, but *GT5* is the sim-enthusiast's alternative. **85%**

RELEASE DATE: 25 MARCH

Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy

So gruelling it almost made us 'PP' ourselves

DETAILS

Publisher
Square Enix
Developer
Square Enix
Price
£34.99
Players
1-2
Genre
Beat-'em-up
Supports
Wi-Fi Multiplayer
Age Rating
12
Web site
http://na.square-enix.com/dissidia_012

PSP

The problem with fan service games is that they often make players blind to the glaring problems therein, as if blinkered by their rank dedication to the brand. The original *Dissidia* was a *Final Fantasy* fan's wet dream, bringing together the most prolific faces from the series' 24-year legacy and pitting them in a series of one-on-one battles. It received glittering praise at launch, and while *Dissidia 012 Final Fantasy* builds upon the mechanics and scope of the original, we have to admit that, even as *Final Fantasy* fans, we had a tough time penetrating its labyrinthine fundamentals and crushing difficulty.

Dissidia 012 can often feel like a grind, but the gratification that comes with it is rare in the genre

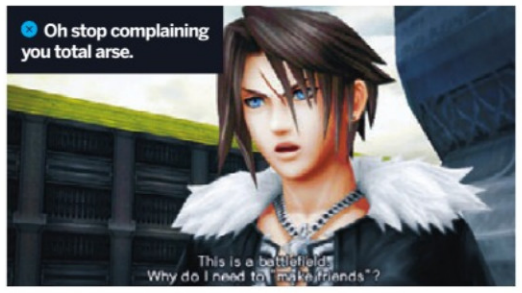
It's not a simple one-on-one brawler like *Street Fighter* or *Tekken*, instead relying on dizzying RPG mechanics, a ludicrous amount of stat-crunching and an overly complex battle mechanic. However, perseverance is rewarded, and in time the intricate blend of defence, dodging and attacking becomes second nature. The key to victory is to deplete your opponent's Bravery gauge – a complicated way of saying 'attack power' – until they are left reeling, then following up with crushing HP attacks until they fall over. It's a unique mechanic that takes a lot of trial and error to understand thanks to the game's unfortunately threadbare tutorials.

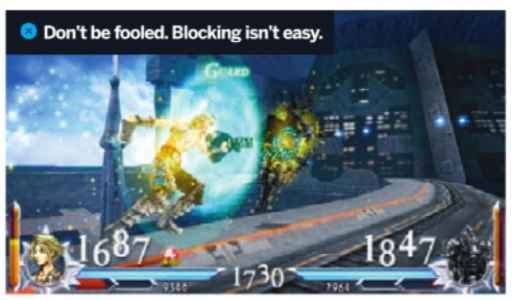
Story mode is huge, delivering a vast open world full of Gateways; grid-based battle realms that drive the plot forward and serve as your main means of levelling up, nabbing loot and, most importantly, getting into fights. Make no mistake, while it's a complex and punishing scrapper, the core plotline is massive, and although difficulty spikes are common, your progress is cumulative, meaning you can and should retry Gateways often, as you get slightly stronger each time, upping your chances of survival.

In this respect, *Dissidia 012* can often feel like a bit of a grind, but the gratification that comes with it is rare in the genre. Characterisation is spot-on as well, so for every questionable defeat the game throws your way thanks to its dodgy camera, millisecond-perfect dodging mechanic or unpredictable enemy attack, there is a certain solace to be found in seeing these familiar characters acting as you would expect, while riffing on each other's personalities. Best of the bunch by a long way is *Final Fantasy VI* baddie Kefka; the flamboyant, insane and menacing embodiment of the pantomime villain.

Uncompromising, impenetrable and intimidating at the outset, perseverance will reveal a rich experience for long-standing fans. Everyone else will likely turn tail and flee before the five-hour mark.

Dave Cook





VERDICT

If you like your fighting games quick, easy and accessible then chances are you'll find *Dissidia 012* a slog, but again, this is a title crafted first and foremost for *Final Fantasy* fans, and it is within this demographic that the game will succeed best.

79%

Or you could try

Crisis Core: Final Final Fantasy Issue 167
An absolutely glorious prequel to *Final Fantasy VII*. **87%**

RELEASE DATE: 18 MARCH

Yakuza 4

The game that is not a game

DETAILS

Publisher
Sega
Developer
In-house
Price
£49.99
Players
1
Genre
RPG/Action-adventure
Supports
1080p, 1080i, 720p, PlayStation Network, DualShock 3
Age Rating
18
Website
sega.com/games/yakuza4

PS3 Broadly speaking, you can split videogames into two camps. There are games that are pad-clenching tests of reaction, adrenalin and raw nerve. You know the type. Games that exist solely to batter your loose, sloppy skills into finely-chiselled finesse and tight execution, thriving on your addiction to competitiveness, leaderboards and the endless drive to better yourself as a gamer, almost forcing you to admire the blood, sweat and tears spilled on the journey to get there. And then there are games that let you fanny about a bit.

Yakuza 4 is very much an example of the latter. It's a languid, leisurely stroll of an experience through its walled-off fictional city of Kamurocho, peppering you with distractions from bento boxes to hostess bars and karaoke to table tennis. At times, it's almost perverse in its pleasure to slow you down, happily saddling you with chatty cut-scenes that stretch into double-digit minutes and not giving you the option to skip them. Little wonder so many characters in *Yakuza 4* smoke.

Persevere and you'll eventually dig up the game buried beneath the smoking and casual conversation. Part RPG, part beat-'em-up and part action-adventure, you're thrown headfirst into a messy storyline and slowly pick your way out by running around town, getting into fights and completing objectives. Yes, *Yakuza 4* is the closest thing Sega has ever made to *Shenmue III* since... *Shenmue II*. Or *Yakuza 3*. Either way, it's the same game in spirit – aimless wandering punctuated by dramatic moments followed by more aimless wandering.

> Aimless wandering punctuated by dramatic moments followed by more aimless wandering

Four games into the *Yakuza* series, you'd expect Sega has perfected the formula yet it defiantly refuses to acknowledge *Yakuza*'s most glaring flaws. The storyline is a complicated crisscross of relationships, character history and twists, making you feel as though you've missed something even if you saw the previous three titles through to their end credits and double-checked the plots on Wikipedia. The city itself is a low-res smudge compared to the detailed cut-scenes but most weirdly of all, *Yakuza 4* isn't even particularly coherent. It thrives on its slow-burning atmosphere, prompting us to say things like "gritty" and "realistic", then happily pisses said atmosphere up the wall by spewing blue flames all over your character as soon as a fight starts, prompting us to say things like "what?" and "huh?" instead. It's not like blue flames are the only culprit shattering the illusion built, as the storyline lurches from believable to absurd faster than an *X Factor* sob story. It's hard to tell what *Yakuza 4* is trying to be, let alone determine if it succeeds.

If this sounds all too negative, it's **Play** being miserable cowards and covering up for the fact that some of you will inevitably hate this type of game. For those of you who embrace *Yakuza 4*'s unique approach to yakuza life and... well, just being a videogame, there's so much to love. Kamurocho is a vibrant playground that rewards exploration, even if said exploration does stem from you trying to avoid being caught in yet another ten-minute cut-scene. The fighting system is immensely satisfying, whether it's fighting against the odds when a gang decides they don't like the look of you or getting the feeling of smashing a plant pot over someone's head spot-on (we're just guessing, obviously, having never indulged in any flora-based violence).

If you're the kind of gamer who scampered all over New Vegas looking for side-quests and chased every flashing icon on *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*'s mini-map, then you're the kind of person *Yakuza 4* will appeal to. It's endearingly top-heavy with pointless moments and bizarre diversions, as though making the actual game was secondary to cramming as many different ideas as possible in its tiny framework. *Yakuza 4* is wrapped up in tighter boundaries than the endless sprawl of something like *New Vegas* but that also makes it more accessible. Every distraction lies within arm's reach, while Sega's ambition never outreaches its arcade heritage, ensuring *Yakuza 4* is always light and easy to get stuck into.

TURTLE POWER

Levelling up and other nonsense

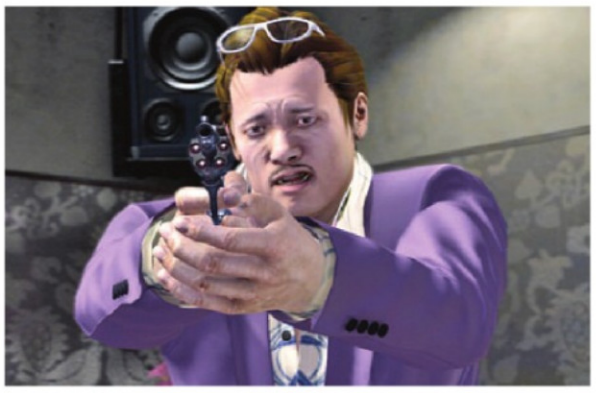
SEEING AS IT has RPG influences running through its veins, it figures that *Yakuza 4* features experience points and a levelling up system. This amounts to do-enough-stuff-and-get-more-moves and they unlock at a healthy rate, giving you reason to regularly dip into the menus. It's worth it for Tortoise Spirit alone, a move we thought we mastered until it transpired it wasn't sitting in front of our monitors for eight hours a day refusing to move anything more than our right hand into a bag of crisps.

Or you could try

Heavy Rain Issue 189
Slower yet more immersive, more polished with more choice. **94%**

www.imagineshop.co.uk

The 'you can't see me contest' went down to the wire.



Caption this and keep it legal. Go on. It's Play's challenge of the month!

Yakuza 4 scored 75% when we reviewed it on import, losing points as we suspected its story was nonsense. Now that the story is delivered in a language we can understand and by voice actors who aren't a waste of studio time, we can confirm the story most definitely is nonsense but hey, we're writing it off with confidence this time. Even so, the English text and voiceover has helped contribute to a unique gaming atmosphere and experience unlike anything else on PlayStation 3, blue flames and all. Sure, it can be goofy. Yes, it feels slightly outdated. Even so, *Yakuza 4* proves Sega's series remains the first port of call for gamers who just want to fanny about a bit.

Ryan King

VERDICT

While it never feels like the freshest slice of gaming served up by Sega, it is one of the most familiar. Veering from utterly absorbing to utterly nonsense, it revels in its existence as a unique gaming experience.

79%

We define ourselves in a similar manner. Man Who Just Ate A Greggs Pasty, for example.

At one point we met a small doll that got turned on if the main character was rude to it. Yeah...

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ar Tonelico Qoga: Knell Of Ar Ciel

More like ARSE Tonelico Qoga

DETAILS

Publisher
NIS America
Developer
Gust
Price
$59.99 (American import)
Players
1
Genre
Action-RPG
Supports
1080i, 720p, Sixaxis, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
12
Website
www.nisamerica.com/games/atq/

PS3

It sometimes feels like Nippon Ichi has some kind of publishing sweatshop with hundreds of employees spending 15 hours a day pumping out one subpar RPG after the other. This is its most recent: the third entry into the *Ar Tonelico* series and by far the most sordid.

You battle alongside Reyvateil companions – essentially very young girls in revealing outfits – whose singing will affect your performance. More notably, attacking in time to the music will enable you to activate a powerful Purge attack, which causes the Reyvateil to shed her clothes. "The more skin she exposes, the more power she gets," explains the game, and then later, "He who controls stripping, controls the battle."

It's a theme that runs throughout the game. 'Diving' into Reyvateil's minds enables you to strengthen your bond with them, and recover 'Hyumas' which increase their song power. To equip them, however, requires convincing the girls to shed their clothing, which can only be achieved by bestowing them with gifts.

It wouldn't feel so insulting if the combat was any good, but it's not. Battles feel shallow and mundane but you'll spend most of your time clicking through boring dialogue screens.

There's not a great deal to praise in this game. *Ar Tonelico Qoga* feels like a glance into the mind of a perverted otaku, and little more.

Chris McMahon

VERDICT

***Ar Tonelico* feels like an excuse to show little girls taking their clothes off. If the game that surrounded the concept had any engaging depth to it we might have forgiven it for some of its immaturity, but it doesn't, so we won't.**

27%

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Rango

Rangoooo... is it any good thoooough?

DETAILS

Publisher
Electronic Arts
Developer
Behaviour Interactive
Price
£39.99
Players
1
Genre
Action-Adventure
Supports
1080i, 720p, Sixaxis, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating
7
Website
www.ea.com/games/rango

PS3

Who do we review this game for? For the kids it's aimed at, or for our loyal **Play** readers? Doing the former would result in a different score, as *Rango* is a perfectly serviceable game that will entertain those content with playing through a simple romp. But it's not a seven-year-old holding this mag. It's you. So that's who this review is for.

Is *Rango* worth your time? No, not really. Taking its cues from *Ratchet & Clank* titles you'll glide through most of *Rango*'s levels on autopilot, platforming, brawling and shooting your way through the enemy rabbits, lizards and hamsters. There are neat ideas throughout: one level sees you flying on the back of a bat, another sees you hiding from

Later in the game you get transported to an alien 8-bit world.

You do get to fend off zombies by playing golf. That's worthy of praise at least.

a towering Hunter S Thompson figure as he searches for you in his shack. Killing enemies also sees them burst into showers of sheriff stars, which can be used to upgrade Rango's various abilities at a Merchant.

But despite its bright levels and gameplay variety, there's nothing here that's going to appeal to an adult. So, **Play** reader, this review is for you. Don't bother yourself with *Rango*. Unless you have kids, of course, in which case you could do worse when it comes to finding light, enjoyable gaming.

Chris McMahon

VERDICT

***Rango* is reasonably well-designed and easy to play. So easy, in fact, that you'll probably switch off while doing so. A game for kids, and not for an older generation weaned on more comprehensive gaming experiences.**

54%

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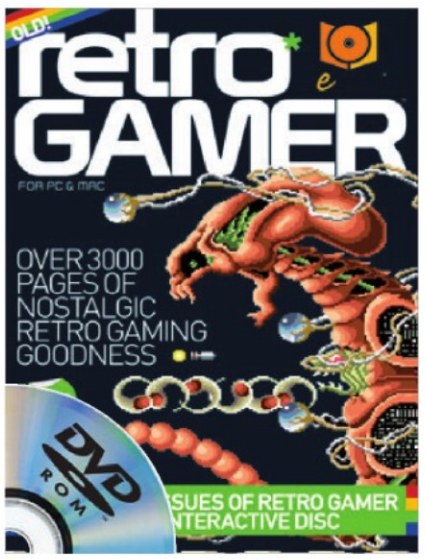

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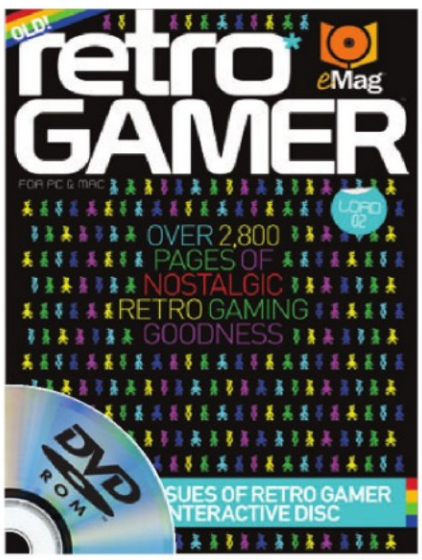

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IMAGINE PUBLISHING

You can avoid the lifestyle nonsense by avoiding single-player.

Driving together: better than not.

Test Drive Unlimited 2 GAME

Unlimited punning opportunities

DETAILS

Publisher
Atari
Developer
Eden Games
Release Date
Out now
Price
£49.99
Players
1-32
Genre
Racing, MMO
Supports
1080p, 720p, Downloadable content, Leaderboards, Dolby Digital 5.1

Away from the absolute nonsense of the single-player storyline, *Test Drive Unlimited 2* reveals itself to be quite a good experience. Yes, the handling is still a bit wonky, the game itself looks poor by modern standards and you do have to drive 15 miles before you can enter an event, but you get to experience it all *with other people*. The amount of difference that makes shouldn't be understated, and promotes the game from a 'hmm' to a 'yeah, I might buy that. One day. When it's cheap'.

That's not to say playing *TDU2* how it's meant to be played totally acquits it from all its guilt – there is still a questionable handling system in place, things do still feel a bit sparse on the whole and it does look budget as hell. But the positives about the experience are far more strongly reinforced when you can just kick back with mates and explore Ibiza and Hawaii. It's a bizarrely relaxing experience, even if you are doing the 200mph hurtle.

Obviously there are more competitive aspects to the online game – ranked races, instant challenges and player-created tests all compete for your attention, and all serve their purpose as would be expected. But it really isn't where the most fun lies in *TDU2*, and it is very much a game that we will be happy to include in our 'best muck about game' charts, if we ever do one of those in the future.

> It's a bizarrely relaxing experience, even if you are doing the 200mph hurtle

We played the game pre-release, but even so there was already a decent online community backing it up (ah, retailers breaking street dates...). While this helped give a good idea of how things will look 'in the wild', it didn't give us a great impression of how things will be post-patches. While it isn't unplayable by any stretch of the imagination, we did experience a fair few instances of glitching out, getting stuck in roads and on scenery and a fair bit of lag. We expect this to be patched out in future updates, so it's unfair to really criticise the game just yet.

TDU2 is a *better* experience in multiplayer – but being designed with that in mind it makes sense. All the same, the fact it simply didn't work right most of the time we were playing it meant it's hard to recommend much about it. Hopefully it'll get fixed.

Ian Dransfield

VERDICT

It's meant to be played online, so it's no surprise that with other folks *TDU2* is far better. Having said that, it's hamstrung by iffy handling, ropey looks and a few teething issues that will hopefully be ironed out with time (and patches).

★★★★★

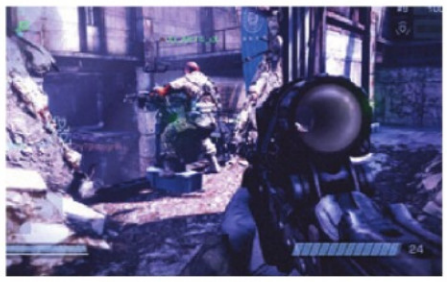
DETAILS **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Guerrilla Games **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £49.99 **Players** 2-16 **Genre** First-person shooter **Supports** 1080p, Downloadable content, Sixaxis, Dolby Digital 5.1, PlayStation Move

Killzone 3 GAME

Forget the campaign, this is where the real fun's at

Let's be honest, *Killzone 3*'s single-player isn't the best. It's certainly pretty, but when it comes to engaging gameplay it leaves something to be desired. Thankfully this isn't the case with the multiplayer, which delivers a slightly more refined, tighter version of that which Guerrilla Games presented in *Killzone 2*.

The most obvious change is that all classes are unlocked from the start, and players allocate how and where they spend their Unlock Points. It's a better system in that each player has a more clearly defined role, but its rewards come at a slower pace than in *Killzone 2*.



The omission of the all-rounder Rifleman class emphasises the need for players to focus on their specific strengths. Failure to do so can be irritating – if Engineers don't establish a useful defence or Tacticians ignore spawn points you'll quickly find yourself on the losing side of the battle.

There are other issues, too – outside of the way maps look there's not much to distinguish one from the other, at least not in the same way that *Black Ops*' Firing Range offers a completely different play experience to Cracked. Also, Operations mode feels like little more than a novelty – it's just Warzone with cut-scenes tacked on.

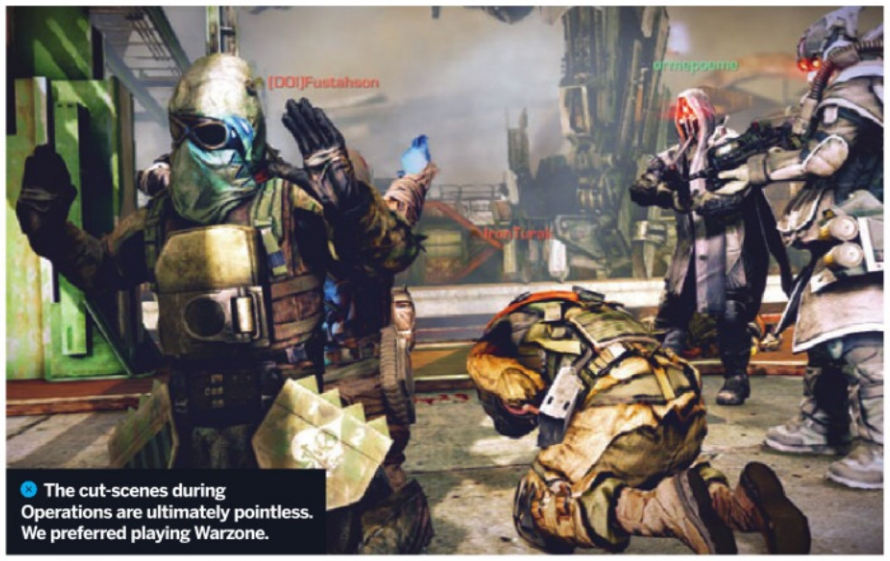
But no matter. *Killzone 3*'s multiplayer is a still a weighty experience, demanding tactics and expertise from its players as well as a steady aim. It may not feel as rewarding as *COD*, or as demanding of teamwork as *Battlefield*, but it's still an entertaining multiplayer that far overshadows the single-player.

Chris McMahon

VERDICT

A solid multiplayer that's got brains as well as brawn.

★★★★★



The cut-scenes during Operations are ultimately pointless. We preferred playing Warzone.

PSN Roundup

BULLETSTORM

Never has a name been so apt

Publisher EA **Developer** People Can Fly **Price** £49.99 **Players** 1-4 **Genre** FPS

Bulletstorm is bloody good fun. You'll know that because you'll have already read our review on page 76 and you read the magazine in order, because doing otherwise ignores the fact we've laid out every page in a very deliberate way for pacing, variety and sexiness. Honest.

Everything you read on those pages carries over to online, which throws four players together as they attempt to crack the point threshold of each wave. It's messy and chaotic yet that's exactly why it thrives. You don't need to have lightning reactions or a deep knowledge of the scoring system to have fun. All you need is a thirst for carnage. Weirdly, it does get worse the more you play it as you start to demand other players actually do understand what's going on but still – bloody good fun. **RK** ★★★★★

MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3

Devil may get bored of seeing Dante

Publisher Capcom **Developer** Capcom **Price** £49.99 **Players** 1-2 **Genre** Fighting

It's a jungle out there, said someone, once, about something. Who it was and what he (she?) was referring to is now lost to the annals of time, so let's pretend he/she/it was talking about *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* online because my god, if it's not a jungle, it's an asylum. Dante flying everywhere, Wolverine running all over the screen, Sentinel grumbling robotic nonsense, Amaterasu who NEVER STOPS ATTACKING... it's a brilliant mix of skill levels and tactics, if not characters (another Dante? Sigh). The netcode holds up well but the pressure has to tell somewhere and it is matchmaking puffing and groaning under the colossal weight of players. Likewise, not being able to spectate matches is a huge miss from the same company responsible for *Super SFIV*. Fix these problems and it's perfect. **RK** ★★★★★

X-MEN: THE ARCADE GAME

Welcome to die!

Publisher Konami **Developer** Backbone Entertainment **Price** £6.29 **Players** 1-6 **Genre** Arcade

You may have noticed the new section on our retro pages called Retro Games We Said We Want To Play Again But Probably Won't. If we were to write about *X-Men: The Arcade Game*, we'd create a new section called Retro Games We Said We Want To Play Again And Did But Then Kind Of Regretted. Hey! We're writing about *X-Men Arcade*! We're not going to repeat that title to fill in space (we're not that lazy) but if you're thinking about picking this up for retro thrills, it's worth considering a few things. First, the default online setting makes it hopelessly easy. Second, players will endlessly spam super powers. Third, those two reasons make it a redundant online experience. It's not a bad choice if you want to button bash through something on a lazy Sunday but Then You'll Kind Of Regret It. Just like we did. **RK** ★★★★★

Call Of Duty: Black Ops – First Strike DLC

Best things come to those who pay lots of dosh

DETAILS
Publisher Activision
Developer Treyarch
Release Date Out Now
Price £12 (approx)
Players 1-16
Genre FPS

FIRST OF ALL, the expected disclaimer. Yes, multiplayer is still laggy. Yes, matchmaking is still more akin to a Russian roulette mini-game than anything else, blowing you away once amid a myriad of disappointments. And yes, those core problems will likely outlive the glow of these new maps.

Still, if you're reading this far then there's clearly enough interest in these maps to have dragged you through that opening, so let's get to it. Stadium, Discovery, Berlin Wall and Kowloon are the maps and they're all brilliant thanks to their intricate design being stretched across a huge terrain. While the internet will see the price and scream about how greedy Activision is, it's impossible to deny that the effort that's gone into them all is evident in the twists and turns dotted throughout.

Dan Peel mini-review: 'These maps sound pretty bloody good.' So there you go!

Kowloon is probably the weakest of the quartet, as it's the kind of map that encourages players to pick a spot and camp rather than really get stuck in, making the vertical design redundant when play slows to a crawl. Even so, it's perfectly balanced by the madness of Stadium where Domination shines thanks to each area having multiple points of attack and Discovery, which thrives on the tension of players trying to avoid the tempting bridge across its middle. This leaves Berlin Wall, a map sliced down the middle by gun turrets that force players along tiny safe passageways.

Even so, yet another disclaimer – these maps are still stapled to the same brand of multiplayer that you'll either love or hate. Four new playgrounds will keep *Black Ops* fans happy but it's a shame about that price. **RK**

VERDICT

While they don't bring anything new to the table, they're all brilliant, intricately designed maps. **80%**

Fallout: New Vegas – Dead Money DLC

Not a reference to disused currency

DETAILS
Publisher Bethesda
Developer Obsidian
Release Date Out Now
Price £7.49
Players 1
Genre RPG

ONCE UPON A time, we thought more *Fallout* was a good thing. When *Fallout 3* was followed by the likes of *Broken Steel*, we gobbled it up and demanded more. Then, *Mothership Zeta* was released. It was unambitious, bland and completely misinterpreted why everyone fell in love with *Fallout 3* to begin with (clue: it's not alien corridors).

However, after playing through *Dead Money*, the first DLC for *New Vegas*, we can only hope that Bethesda is now pulling the same trick in reverse. Why? Because *Dead Money* is also unambitious, bland and misinterprets why everyone fell in love with *Fallout: New Vegas* to begin with (clue: it's not toxic traps).

One of the Nightkins shortly after we asked him what he thought of *Mothership Zeta*.

It's more *Fallout*, so the blandness of *Dead Money* and its reliance on toxic traps and walled-off gameplay is offset by new items and Trophies. The setting of Sierra Madre's casino frozen in time allows Obsidian to conjure up an interesting back story, at the very least.

So that's the question you have to ask yourself. Do you find back story and location as fun as the gameplay? If the answer is yes, it's worth checking out. Otherwise, wait for the next DLC. It's the Bethesda DLC trick in reverse – remember? **RK**

VERDICT

A missed opportunity, with *Dead Money* focusing on mostly on the worst aspects of *New Vegas*. **60%**

Dead Space: Extraction GAME

In space no one can hear you waggle

DETAILS
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Visceral Games
Release Date Out Now
Price £11.99 **Players** 1-2 **Genre** Arcade

IF YOU'RE ONE of the lucky ones who nabbed a *Dead Space 2* limited edition pack you'll already know how good *Extraction* is. If you didn't then trust us, you need this game.

In a world where games such as *Mass Effect 2* and *Heavy Rain* are praised (and rightly so) for their compelling narratives and entertaining characters, it's rather refreshing to find a lightgun title, of all things, that's just as immersive and cinematic as its retail peers.

Set three weeks before the events of the original *Dead Space*, *Extraction* features a mismatched quartet as they attempt to escape the doomed colony Aegis VII. Although it plays like a conventional on-rails lightgun game, it soon reveals itself to be anything but thanks to the incredible atmosphere it delivers and a constant array of cinematic set pieces.

Shooting Necromorphs in *Extraction* is just as enjoyable as it is in the traditional *Dead Space* games. *Extraction* stays close to its *Dead Space* roots by delivering plenty of areas where what you don't see, or think you'll see, is just as scary as it was in the originals.

Indeed, navigating sewers with only a glowstick for company calls to mind great cinematic moments like *Alien*. In fact, if *Extraction* succeeds in one area above all others it's definitely in its storytelling. Easily outclassing both *Dead Space* and its recent sequel, the story is expertly paced and delivers plenty of twists and turns.

Dead Space: Extraction is also a great advocate for Move, and while it features a few little niggles, it's easily (along with *echochrome II*) the most essential game to use the peripheral.

Extraction went all but unnoticed by Wii owners, which is a shame as it's one of the best lightgun games around and an essential addition to the *Dead Space* canon. Pray you don't make the same mistake as your Wii counterparts and get on board. **DJ**

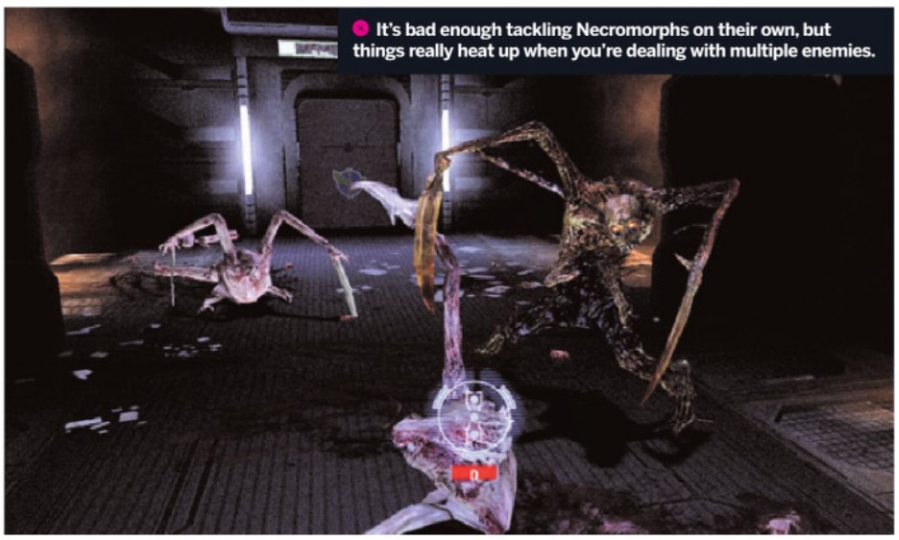
VERDICT

Bold and inventive, *Extraction* is a worthy addition to the *Dead Space* franchise. **88%**

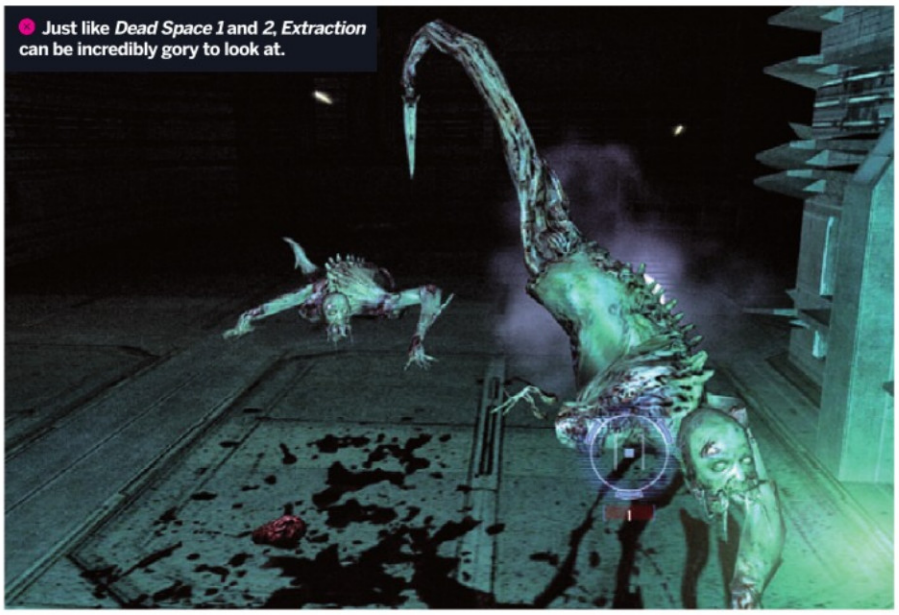
Store Reviews
それはどのようによかったか。

Although *Extraction* hasn't been given a full HD makeover, it still manages to look exceptionally creepy and atmospheric.

One excellent scene has you in a gun turret taking down hordes of asteroids that are hurtling towards you.



It's bad enough tackling Necromorphs on their own, but things really heat up when you're dealing with multiple enemies.



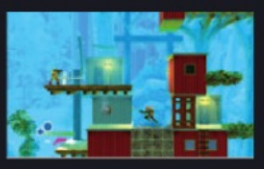
Just like *Dead Space 1* and *2*, *Extraction* can be incredibly gory to look at.

Store Roundup

BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED 2 GAME

Fat Shark jumps the shark

Publisher Capcom **Developer** Fat Shark **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £11.99 **Players** 1-2 **Genre** Arcade



AFTER BEING MIGHTILY impressed by *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, it's sad to report that its sequel is something of a damp squib. The rope physics feel far too springy, while the new jump mechanic is far too floaty and greatly lowers the game's difficulty. There are also bouts of slowdown that can result in missed button presses. While we welcome the new two-player mode, the general lack of polish for such a high price tag is unforgivable. **DJ** **61%**

MASS EFFECT 2: CERBERUS NETWORK PACK DLC

BioWare's RPG gets a little more epic

Publisher Electronic Arts **Developer** BioWare **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £11.99 **Players** 1 **Genre** RPG

IF YOU DIDN'T buy *Mass Effect 2* brand new you won't have access to this DLC. For your cash you'll get a new character, mercenary Zaeed Massani, his very own side mission, a powerful new weapon in the form of the Arc Projector and the Cerberus Assault Gear, an extremely powerful piece of armour. Add in the ability to play five new missions with the Hammerhead craft and the Cerberus Network pack becomes a solid, if rather expensive add-on. **DJ** **72%**

X-MEN ARCADE GAME

All the fun of the arcades without the fighting for space

Publisher Konami **Developer** Backbone Entertainment **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £6.29 **Players** 1-4 (1-6 online) **Genre** Arcade

WE MOANED ABOUT the online modes. Now we've got space here, we're going to fill it by moaning about single-player as well. Bosses range from overly simple to stupidly hard, the choice of characters (Dazzler?) is strange and it's over in the blink of an eye. Yet even with modern Marvel games on offer, there's something compelling here, from the powers to the wonky translations. Expensive but worth it for nostalgic thrills. **RK** **60%**

STACKING GAME

And you thought Russian Dolls just made good ornaments...

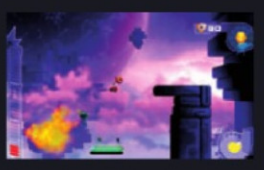
Publisher THQ **Developer** Double Fine **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £7.99 **Players** 1 Genre Adventure

DOUBLE FINE'S SECOND digital outing is a marked improvement on its last outing, the still enjoyable *Costume Quest*. Taking control of a young Russian Doll named Charlie Blackman you must take over other Russian Dolls in order to solve a variety of puzzles. It's a wonderful concept, helped by imaginative game design and superb presentation. A truly enchanting game and Double Fine's best release since *Psychonauts*. **DJ** **88%**

EXPLODEMON GAME

BANG! BANG! BANG! Sigh

Publisher Curve Studios **Developer** In-House **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £7.99 **Players** 1 **Genre** Platformer



CURVE STUDIOS LATEST game is a loving tribute to 16-bit platformers. Taking control of the titular hero you can explode him to reach higher areas, destroy enemies and move a variety of different objects. As with many 16-bit platformers there are a huge amount of items for you to collect and secret rooms to discover. It's let down slightly by occasionally frustrating controls and monotonous boss encounters, but the inventive level design keeps you returning for more. **DJ** **70%**

CHIME SUPER DELUXE GAME

The music sounds better with you

Publisher Zoe Mode **Developer** Zoe Mode **Release Date** Out Now **Price** £6.29 **Players** 1 **Genre** Puzzle

LAZY REVIEW CLICHÉ time: *Chime Super Deluxe* is a bit like *Lumines* and *Tetris*! And it's a bit like... nothing else. Because it's packing originality. So the lazy review cliché has failed. Even so, the idea of slapping *Tetris*-shaped blocks down while a beatline scrolls across the screen, playing more and more music as the grid fills, feels familiar but fresh. Although it lacks polish, *Chime Super Deluxe* makes up for it with a zesty soundtrack. **RK** **80%**

The imagery throughout *Guardians* is very impressive, if a little frightening for the very young.

Legend Of The Guardians: The Owls Of Ga'Hoole

Zack Snyder's slo-mo animated flick is a real hoot

DETAILS

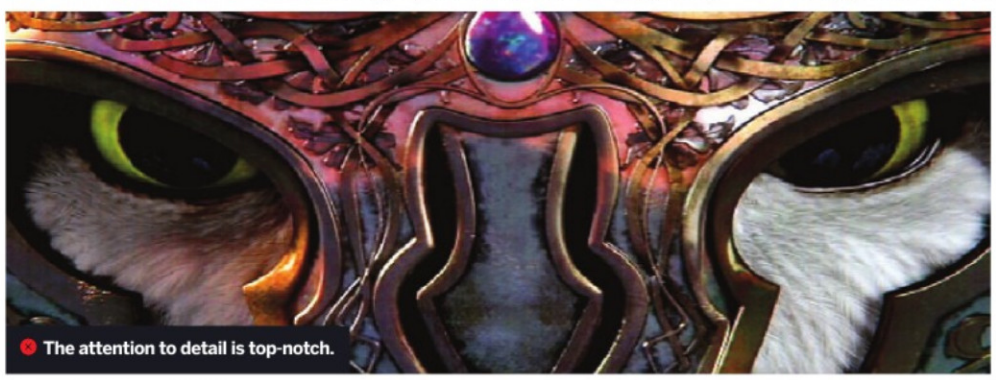
Price
£24.99
Sound
English DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1
Director
Zack Snyder
Starring
Jim Sturgess, Sam Neill, Geoffrey Rush

There are some things in life you can always depend on. A new *Call Of Duty* will appear like clockwork each year, and animated films will always look stunning in high definition.

Zack Snyder's latest film is no different, and it's yet another animated flick that proves that HD really is the future of home entertainment. From its gorgeous sweeping vistas to its feathered protagonists and mesmerising battle scenes, every moment of *Legend Of The Guardians* screams demo material. It may lack the vivid primary colours of *Toy Story 3*, but the attention to detail is sensational and it's helped further by the liberal use of slow motion during the many battle scenes that Snyder has filled the film with.

It's something of a shame then that while Animal Logic (the team behind *Happy Feet*) can easily match Pixar and DreamWorks from a technical point of view, it hasn't quite managed to master successful storytelling. This in part could be something to do with the fact that *Legend Of The Guardians* consists of the first three books in the *Guardians Of Ga'Hoole* series, which comprised 15 novels before the franchise finally concluded in 2008.

As a result the tale of Soren, a young barn owl who grows up on tales of the legendary Guardians of Ga'Hoole, only to discover that they are real and fighting an alliance of evil owls, often feels rushed. There are a large number of stereotypes to introduce including a jealous older brother who joins the other side and a wizened old war hero who wants to gloss over his past glories, and while they're all perfectly charming there's never enough time for their characters to develop. Which is a shame, as the core concept of Soren escaping the evil owls and eventually overthrowing them is perfectly sound, it just feels a little rushed and disjointed in places.


The attention to detail is top-notch.

Zack Snyder might sound a strange choice for an animated film about birds, but once you see *Legend Of The Guardians* in motion you quickly understand why he received the gig. Bedecked in armour and metallic head gear and brandishing dangerous weapons in their claws, this is like an animated version of *300*, with copious amounts of slo-mo, needlessly showy special effects and some genuinely exhilarating battle scenes. It's also a rather dark film, with deaths aplenty, some truly creepy moments and fighting that can be quite vicious. It's preposterously silly at times (not helped by the mainly British cast trying to pull off Australian accents) but *Legend Of The Guardians* remains a thoroughly entertaining yarn.

Sadly the included extras are rather lacking, with a noticeable absence being the usually talkative Snyder who is nowhere to be seen on the Blu-ray's contents. By far the most impressive extra is an augmented viewing option that features an animated owl who talks you through key parts of the film, but even this feels rather slight.

Darran Jones

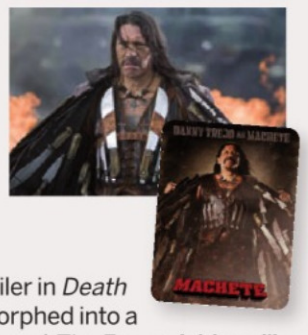
VERDICT

It won't trouble *Toy Story 3*, *WALL•E* or even *Shrek*, but *Legend Of The Guardians* remains an entertaining and highly watchable film, with a stunning transfer.
RATING: ★★★★★

Plus all the latest hardware reviews

Blu-ray Reviews
それはどのようによかったか。

Machete



PRICE: £22.99
SOUND: DTS-HD MA 5.1
DIRECTOR: Ethan Maniquis, Robert Rodriguez
STARRING: Danny Trejo, Michelle Rodriguez, Jessica Alba

IT STARTED OUT as a fake trailer in *Death Proof*, but *Machete* has now morphed into a proper film. Fans of *Desperado* and *The Expendables* will love *Machete*'s tongue-in-cheek humour, gory set pieces and Michelle Rodriguez's excellent turn as a hard as nails freedom fighter. Silly, but undeniably fun.
RATING: ★★★★★

Saw: The Final Chapter

PRICE: £24.99
SOUND: DTS-HD MA 7.1
DIRECTOR: Kevin Greutert
STARRING: Tobin Bell, Costas Mandylor, Chad Donella

THIS IS THE seventh instalment to the seemingly endless *Saw* franchise and allegedly the last part as well. Here's hoping it really is the final chapter, because the elaborate and needlessly gory and vicious traps are a world away from the clever indie squirm-fest that kicked off the franchise back in 2004.
RATING: ★★★★★

Unstoppable

PRICE: £28.99
SOUND: Dolby Digital 5.1
DIRECTOR: Tony Scott
STARRING: Denzel Washington, Chris Pine, Rosario Dawson

YOU'D BE FORGIVEN for thinking that *Unstoppable* is nothing more than *Speed* on a train. Worry not, because while the plot is as generic as they come – Washington and Pine must stop a runaway train loaded with deadly chemicals – it's saved by jaw-dropping set pieces and brilliant chemistry between its two leads.
RATING: ★★★★★

This Is England '86

PRICE: £24.99
SOUND: Dolby Digital 5.1
DIRECTOR: Shane Meadows
STARRING: Thomas Turgoose, Johnny Harris, Vicky McClure

SET AGAINST THE 1986 World Cup and originally shown on Channel 4 as a four-part series, *This Is England '86* is a worthy follow-up to the 2006 movie. Often unflinching in its portrayal of British life and with a strong focus on the working class, this is a typical Meadows film, which only suffers due to an overly long running time.
RATING: ★★★★★

Skyline

PRICE: £24.99
SOUND: DTS-HD MA 5.1
DIRECTOR: Colin Strause, Greg Strause
STARRING: Eric Balfour, Scottie Thompson, Donald Faison

SKYLINE THE TRAILER was amazing; offering a stunning, technically accomplished take on the invasion movie. *Skyline* the movie is a completely different experience and not a pleasant one. Behind all the special effects is a movie that's so bland that it could have spilled from the fevered brow of any sci-fi-obsessed teenager. Very disappointing.
RATING: ★★★★★

The American

PRICE: £24.99
SOUND: Dolby Digital 5.1
DIRECTOR: Anton Corbijn
STARRING: George Clooney, Bruce Altman, Thekla Reuten

THE CLOONSTER'S LATEST release sees him playing an assassin who heads off to a remote Italian village for one last hit, only to get involved with a local hooker and suffer a mid-life crisis. It's a solid tale and Clooney delivers another winning, if predictable, performance (how many characters with mid-life crises will he play?) but it never really excites.
RATING: ★★★★★

Classic Blu-ray
Fantastic Blu-rays you need to have in your collection

#2 Léon: Director's Cut

Price: £24.99 **Sound:** DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 **Director:** Luc Besson
Starring: Jean Reno, Natalie Portman, Gary Oldman

LÉON IS A classic example of a director at the top of his game. While he's now content to work behind the scenes, Luc Besson used to be a director of great repute, lending his distinctive shooting style and eye for detail to an amazingly eclectic array of films.

Léon is arguably his greatest offering. Jean Reno plays the titular Léon, a hitman with a heart who adores his plant, loves Gene Kelly and has one rule: no women, no kids. But his life is turned upside down when a corrupt detective kills a family that shares the same apartment block as Léon and makes an orphan of the youngest daughter.

Matilda slowly brings the assassin out of his shell and the end result is a truly mesmerising movie that mixes drama and meticulously staged action sequences to great effect. With its brilliant transfer, cracking audio and top extras, *Léon* is an essential Blu-ray.

Blu Charts™

UK Top 5

1. **Bambi**
It's a Disney flick, which means a stunning transfer and a wealth of superb extras.
RATING: ★★★★★

2. **Piranha 3D**
Has no right to be as fun as it is but all the cast are in on the joke. A worthy homage to the original.
RATING: ★★★★★

3. **The Town**
Ben Affleck again proves his directing credentials with another gripping urban thriller.
RATING: ★★★★★

4. **Inception**
Nolan's topsy turvy thriller refuses to disappear from the charts. A damn good film.
RATING: ★★★★★

5. **Once Upon A Time In America**
Sergio Leone's epic gangster thriller is essential.
RATING: ★★★★★

US Top 5

1. **Alice In Wonderland**
Forget Tim Burton's reboot and stick with Disney's animated take on Lewis Carroll's classic novel.
RATING: ★★★★★

2. **Red**
The graphic novel has lost some of its appeal in cinematic form, but *Red* continues to do well.
RATING: ★★★★★

3. **I Spit On Your Grave**
A surprisingly solid update of the 1978 video nasty. Provides plenty of thrills and chills.
RATING: ★★★★★

4. **The Social Network**
David Fincher's Oscar contender is a fascinating look at the creator of Facebook.
RATING: ★★★★★

5. **Inception**
Inception is still doing big business on Blu-ray, despite being released last December.
RATING: ★★★★★

Top 5 Horror

1. **The Thing**
The effects look a bit ropey on Blu-ray, but the transfer itself is superb. An essential disc.
RATING: ★★★★★

2. **Halloween**
In addition to being an expertly paced horror movie, *Halloween* also features a wonderful transfer.
RATING: ★★★★★

3. **A Nightmare On Elm Street**
Ticks all the right horror boxes and is loaded with great extras as well.
RATING: ★★★★★

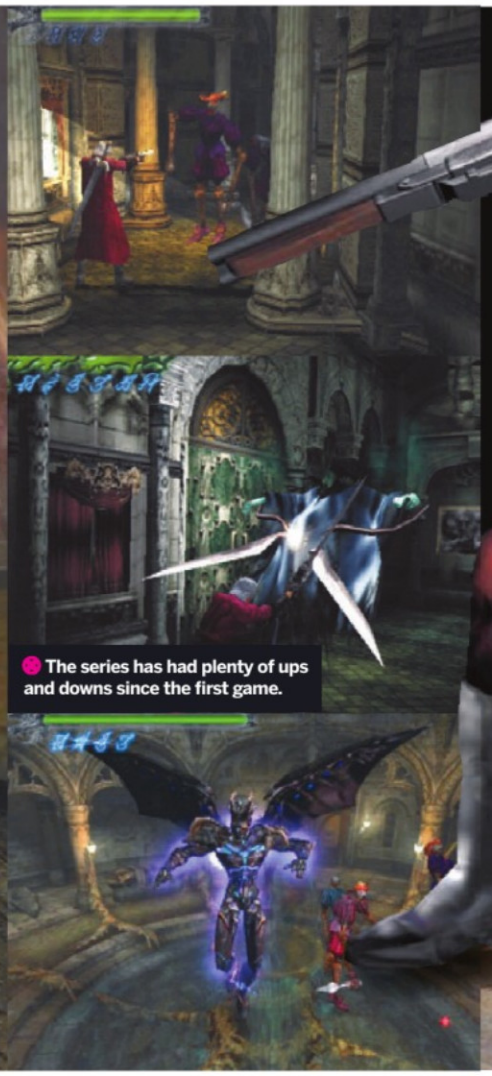
4. **The Shining**
Stanley Kubrick's re-telling of the classic Stephen King book works well on Blu-ray.
RATING: ★★★★★

5. **An American Werewolf In London**
Another cinematic classic that receives new life on Blu-ray.
RATING: ★★★★★

UNDER THE INFLUENCE... The games that changed it all

Devil May Cry was the coolest game around and if you didn't think so there was likely something wrong with you.

He may have looked a bit like a woman, but Dante was most definitely the man.



The series has had plenty of ups and downs since the first game.

DEVIL MAY CRY

Release date 2001 • **Publisher** Capcom • **Developer** Capcom
Games it influenced Bayonetta • Vanquish • God Hand

With *Ninja Gaiden*, *Bayonetta*, *Vanquish* and other such games offering slashy-shooty-stabby-moany-about-camera thrills, it feels like the genre has been around forever. They might have lurched into the realm of multiformat lives recently but 3D action games remain every bit as PlayStation as completing *Final Fantasy*, swearing at *FIFA* or prancing about in *Tomb Raider*.

Yet before the original *Devil May Cry*, the genre didn't exist. There was *Onimusha*, which was sort of slashy-shooty-stabby-moany-about-camera but anchored you with *Resident Evil* controls. Slowly rotating on the spot as your character gently shuffles his feet about isn't going to cause a rush of blood to anyone's gaming crotch. *Dynasty Warriors* also sort of tried but relied on your ◻-mashing thumb not disintegrating into a bloody stump rather than anything remotely skilful, plus it wasn't cool. Then Dante hit the scene and everything changed.

Devil May Cry was the coolest game ever made. Dante was the Duran Duran member who never got old – white hair that stopped just short of a mullet, red leather overcoat and a cocky attitude discovered through his one-liners rather than the press release shouting DANTE HAS ATTITUDE. He was the perfect character to stylishly slash and shoot his way through the dark castles and demons before him, every bit the Gothic rockstar in a Transylvanian MTV video.

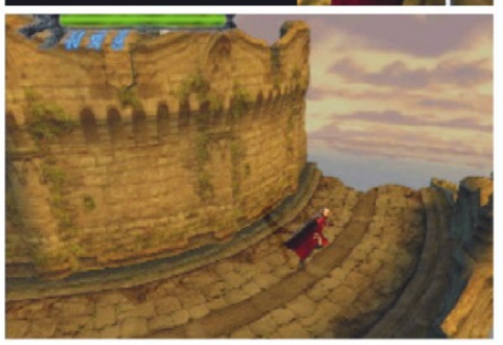
Underneath the swagger, *Devil May Cry* was no lightweight. With the option to mix up sword and gunplay on the fly, swiping demons in the air before juggling them with Dante's pistols became one of the most iconic moments of the *Devil May Cry* series. Learning how to string together elaborate combos was what kept the game feeling fresh during its downtime between boss battles, as you tried to nudge the in-game combo rating towards the elusive S rank.

> 3D action games remain every bit as PlayStation as prancing about in Tomb Raider

It's been a remarkably uneven series since it crashed onto PlayStation 2 in 2001. *Devil May Cry 2* was one of the most disappointing sequels ever made, while *Devil May Cry 3* was a real gamer's game, a tough bastard that was notorious for its challenge. *Devil May Cry 4*, on the other hand, came and went without too much fuss, while series reboot *DmC* has had the opposite effect, causing internet meltdowns with their sheer fury. Still, the original lives on – a true PlayStation classic.

WHAT WE SAID: Issue 82 • 93%
"Reinvents the survival horror genre with a couple of zeroes"

Stringing together sword and gun combos was a great feeling.



YOU NEVER PLAYED THIS

We can't imagine why *Ribbit King* didn't sell in the UK.

RIBBIT KING

There is no introduction to *Ribbit King* that can do it justice. None. It's an embarrassment to *Ribbit King* to even try. It's a golf game where you're hitting frogs instead of golf balls. Which is, you know, kind of weird.

Still, it's not as weird as then seeing your frog explode out of a Moon crater because an asteroid landed on it, or jumping out of the way of elephant feet, or being carried around the level in a pterodactyl's mouth, or having hands with faces on wave it towards the hole, or seeing your frog disappear into a whirlpool before being spat out of the ground elsewhere. Where a giant dinosaur worm thing tries to eat it.

And ends up throwing your frog on a conveyor belt that rides to the top of a mountain. Where there's a sign that says 'TOP.' All accompanied by calypso music. Obviously.

There's not even enough room to question why the frame rate drops to flick-book levels when nothing is going on, why the referee has a lisp or any of the other millions of questions that playing *Ribbit King* leaves you with. If it sold more than two copies in the UK, both of which reside in the **Play** offices, we'd be shocked. *Ribbit King* is the most beautiful disaster of a videogame ever made and as annoying as it is to declare opinion as fact, as though that gives it more authority... that's a fact. FACT.

SCHOOL ACCORDING TO PLAYSTATION

DID YOUR SCHOOL have huge ramps dotted about the place? Roofs to kickflip off? Secret tapes hovering in midair? School bells to smash? Flags to grind down? No? Ours neither. Only in America! Though your school may have had roofs, on second thought.

WE COULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT...

MIAMI VICE

SOME GAMES HAVE to be played to be believed. *Okami*, *Demon's Souls*... and *Miami Vice*. Ahem. No game has ever pulled off this level of incompetence mixed with accidental comedy. It's hard to describe just how bad it is. Imagine *GTA III*'s on-foot sections without any feet and that's close to the clumsy third-person 'action'.

Instead, a story about the day it came in. Initially played by a depressed reviewer, a crowd of almost 20 people soon gathered round to gawp, point and laugh. When Crockett tumbled forwards in his tripping-over-shoelaces animation that's supposed to be a dive, the editor of **Retro Gamer** was in tears with laughter. When a man who reviews *Pac-Man* every month laughs at you, there really is no hope.

If words could do justice to *Miami Vice*'s accidental hilarity, we'd use them now. But they don't. So we can't.

RETRO GAMES WE SAID WE WANT TO PLAY AGAIN BUT PROBABLY WON'T

ISS Pro '98

WHEN KONAMI COULDN'T afford official licences, it spelt player names slightly wrong, hence Paraguay's Arce becoming Arse. Scoring with him became wee 15-year-old **Play**'s obsession. Can't be arsed (no pun intended) going back to it now, though. It's OLD.

SSX Tricky

RECENT SSX TALK has **Play** reminiscing about swirling down a mountain with Elise while holding on to as many shoulder buttons as possible for trick variations. But really, we just want to hear the *It's Tricky* remix again, which we found within 6 seconds of firing up YouTube.

RIDGE RACER TYPE 4

THIS WAS JON'S choice, though the millions of *Ridge Racer*s have now blurred into one. Which one was *Type 4*? "It's the fourth one," he says, before putting his headphones back on and going back to work. Oh. Cheers.

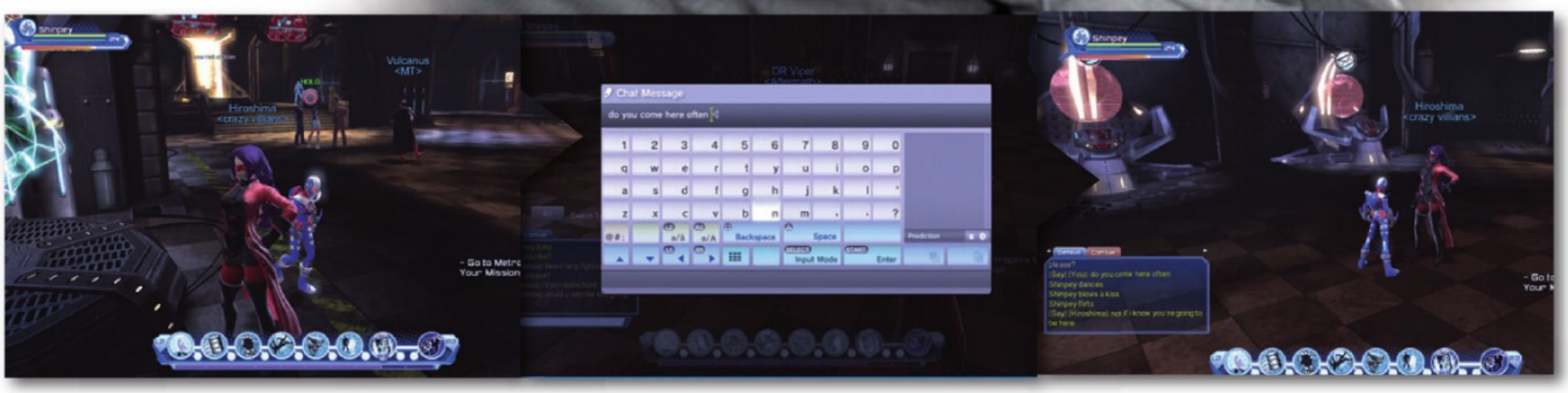
Command & Conquer

IT'S A GAMING classic so we have to talk about it in mythical, lofty terms, avoiding angry emails from *Command & Conquer* fans. But really? On those controls? With missions that bland? Sigh. We'll shoot things with sniper rifles instead, ta.

PLAY TEST ANSWERS THE BIG QUESTIONS

CAN YOU FIND LOVE ONLINE?

This month, we delve into DC Universe Online to find Mrs Play and hope it's not a guy playing as a female avatar. Ha! Like we're that fussy



THE SUAVE APPROACH:

There's no better place for a dashing, young gentleman to begin his search for a female companion than the sophisticated bars of Metropolis. Only because Metropolis lacks dark alleyways with sufficient ambush points. Regardless, it's there that the cold, sexy silhouette of Hiroshima strikes a light in **Play**'s heart like a smouldering lighthouse in a harbour of hopelessness. The flowing purple hair. The full figure. Thighs that could crush nuts. What a woman Hiroshima is!

Turning the charm factor from **Play**'s default of ten all the way up to 11, Hiroshima's defences are melted with a killer opening line. "Do you come here often?" Hiroshima stops mid-run. She's typing a reply! Yes! The screen fades to a hazy blur of holding hands with Hiroshima, running together through a field, rolling around in daisies, Foreigner playing in the background, lips locking as... wait. "Not if I know you're going to be here." Then she runs off. Oh. Sadface.

FAIL

THE AGGRESSIVE APPROACH:

With the suave approach failing and leaving **Play** as a miserable, hollow husk of a man, it's time for a different approach. The alpha male approach! It can't possibly fail, as nothing will stand out more in the insecure world of MMOs than a loud, boisterous male dominating over the weaklings and showing true strength.

There are two problems with the aggressive method. The alpha male approach doesn't work too well when you've already made your character as a miniature blue-and-white robot. Machismo is difficult enough to take seriously online as is, let alone when it's delivered by something that looks like it's tumbled out of *Robot Wars*' bin. The other problem is declaring that you're going to kick everyone's arse when they're already kicking each other's arses, then they size you up and blast your character into space dust. No woman wants to take home a jar of robot ashes for the night. Not even the weird ones. Sigh.

FAIL

THE FEMALE APPROACH:

Yes, this is... look. There's no easy way of explaining this really. But everyone needs a little bit of warmth in their life and if that means dressing up as a woman and dancing in front of the congregating males outside the Metropolis nightclub, then that's exactly what has to be done. Yet no one is paying any attention. "NEED HELP WIV BANE," shouts one. "Someone invite me 2 da leege," says another. Just when it's starting to look desperate and the strench of failure makes **Play**'s eyes water, someone called Steel Lord stops, hypnotised by the dancing.

Play dances. **Play** winks. Steel Lord asks to join a group and **Play** frantically searches through the clumsy menus trying to find the right option. **Play** notices Steel Lord running away. **Play** gives chase. **Play** sobs. Is this really it? Is this what one man's search for love online has come to? Someone must want to love. Someone? Anyone? Please.
Please. Anyone?!
Please. Oh god.
Please. PLEASE.

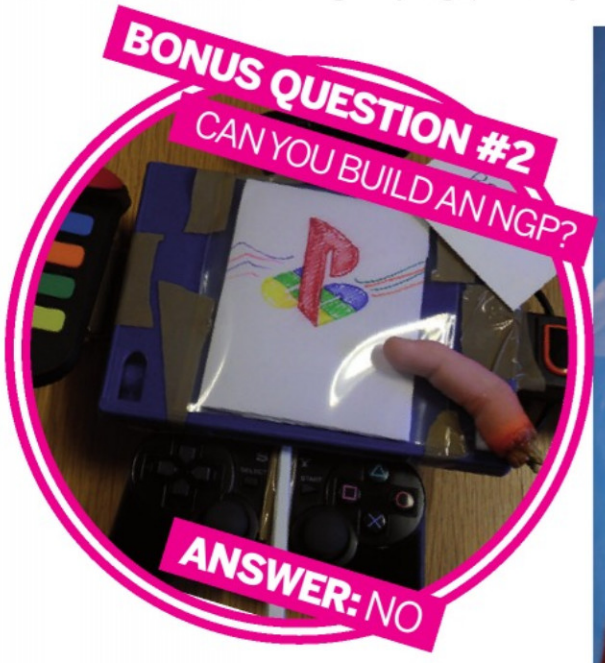
FAIL

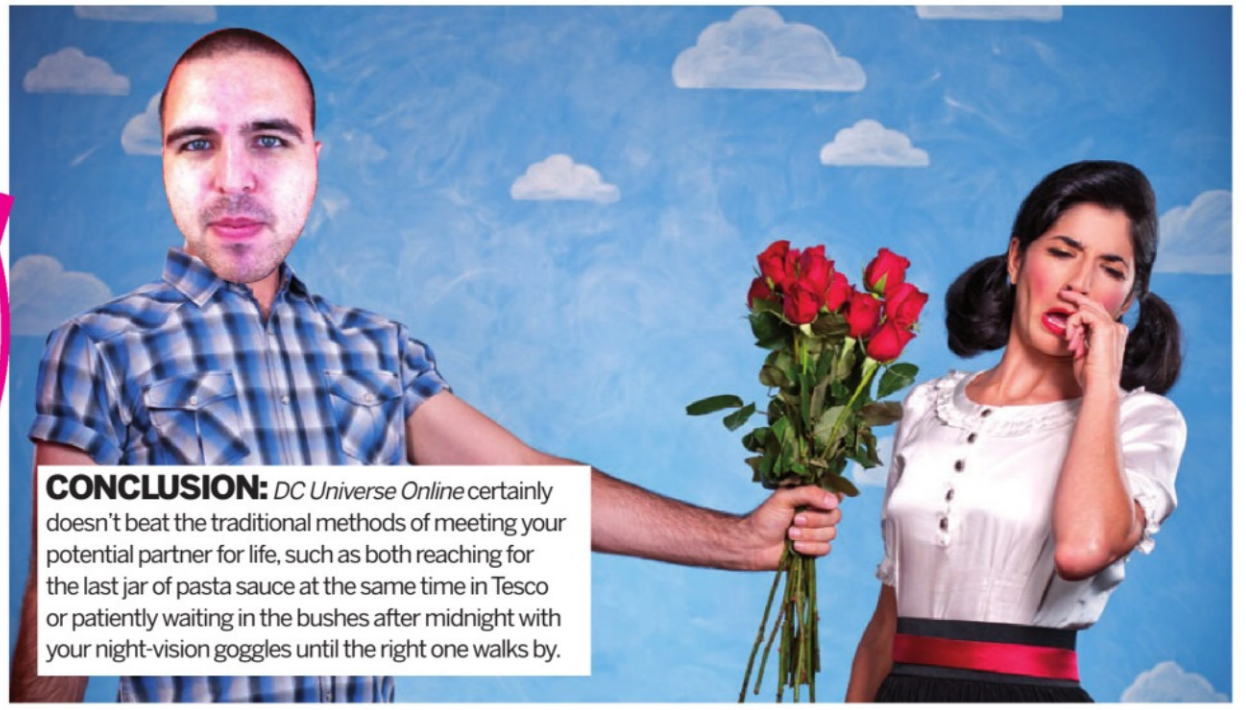
THE DIRECT APPROACH:

With the night threatening to end the same way they all do, in front of the TV eating a microwave lasagne for one, it was time for a last throw of the dice. Time for the direct approach. There's a furry-fox thing fittingly called Tatsuya Fox (thing). "What's up, baby?" stammers **Play**, the last bit of faux machismo and courage conjuring up a horribly out-of-place winking smilie. "Nothing much lol," she replies, with a wink back. Pardon? What? WHAT?!

A few more awkward lines of dialogue and we're on the dancefloor together, which is the socially acceptable way of saying we both moved to the dancing NPCs bit and selected Social, then Dance. Friend request sent, friend request received, as strains of Foreigner start up in the background again. Tatsuya could be a man underneath that furry costume but it doesn't matter. Tonight, **Play** is victorious and tonight, **Play** celebrates with a microwave lasagne for one! Oh. Hang on. This hasn't worked out at all.

FAIL





CONCLUSION: *DC Universe Online* certainly doesn't beat the traditional methods of meeting your potential partner for life, such as both reaching for the last jar of pasta sauce at the same time in Tesco or patiently waiting in the bushes after midnight with your night-vision goggles until the right one walks by.

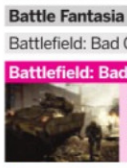
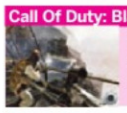
PlayList

If you want to know what a game scored then these pages are for you

GAME UNDER

Our favourite fighting moves in videogames

PS3 LISTING

game	issue	score
3D Collection	195	75%
3D Dot Game Heroes	**192**	**87%**
50 Cent: Blood On The Sand	177	70%
Afro Samurai	**177**	**61%**
Agarest: Generations Of War	187	78%
Alpha Protocol	**193**	**83%**
Aliens Vs Predator	189	79%
Alone In The Dark	**173**	**70%**
Armored Core For Answer	173	65%
Armored Core 4	**153**	**67%**
Army Of Two	164	80%
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	**188**	**65%**
Ashes Cricket 2009	183	30%
Assassin's Creed	**161**	**58%**
Assassin's Creed II	186	89%
Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood	**199**	**91%**
More than enough additions to take the *Assassin's Creed* formula into modern classic territory.		
Atelier Rorona: The Alchemist Of Arland	**198**	**77%**
Backbreaker	193	70%
Band Hero	**187**	**68%**
Batman: Arkham Asylum	183	85%
Battle Fantasia	**176**	**67%**
Battlefield: Bad Company	168	78%
Battlefield: Bad Company 2	**190**	**93%**
 Single-player is fairly impressive but take it online and it's bordering on genius. This is quite possibly the best shooter on PS3 today.		
Bayonetta*	**187**	**93%**
The most over-the-top, inventive, consistently thrilling, overtly sexual, guiltily enjoyable Japanese action game we've played in years.		
Beijing 2008	168	54%
Beowulf	**161**	**61%**
Bionic Commando	179	82%
BioShock	**172**	**93%**
BioShock 2	189	88%
BlackSite	**163**	**43%**
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	160	58%
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	**190**	**85%**
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift	**198**	**94%**
With its diverse roster, stunning visuals and furiously paced gameplay, *Continuum Shift* is a must-have for beat-'em-up fans.		
Blazing Angels	151	54%
Blitz: The League II	**172**	**67%**
Blur	193	86%
Borderlands	**185**	**80%**
Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	171	75%
Brütal Legend	**185**	**79%**
Burnout Paradise	162	74%
Buzz!: Quiz TV	**168**	**82%**
Buzz! Quiz World	185	70%
Call Of Duty 3	**151**	**77%**
Call Of Duty: World At War	173	68%
Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	**160**	**88%**
Call Of Duty: Black Ops	**199**	**94%**
 Treyarch's first genuinely brilliant entry to the series and a standard-bearer for fast-paced online shooters.		
Call Of Juarez: Bound In Blood	181	85%
Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow	**197**	**85%**
Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena	178	87%

game	issue	score
Civilization Revolution	**168**	**90%**
Clash Of The Titans	**193**	**65%**
Clive Barker's Jericho	159	84%
Colin McRae: DiRT	**158**	**91%**
Colin McRae: DiRT 2	**184**	**87%**
Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	178	65%
Conan	**160**	**71%**
Condemned 2	165	78%
Conflict: Denied Ops	**164**	**50%**
Create	199	71%
Cross Edge	**182**	**59%**
Damnation	181	38%
Dance Dance Revolution	**201**	**52%**
Dante's Inferno	189	80%
Dark Sector	**165**	**62%**
Dark Void	188	81%
Darksiders	**188**	**83%**
DC Universe Online	202	80%
Dead Rising 2	**197**	**78%**
Dead Space	172	87%
Dead Space 2	**201**	**92%**
The point where the *Dead Space* series stepped up and became something to be genuinely excited about.		
Dead To Rights: Retribution	**192**	**68%**
Def Jam: Icon	151	79%
Def Jam Rapstar	**199**	**72%**
Demon's Souls	**193**	**92%**
As good as it was when we reviewed it on import, but with a better translation and it's also available here. One of PS3's best games.		
Destroy All Humans!: Path Of The Furon	**178**	**29%**
Devil May Cry 4	163	89%
Disgaea 3: Absence Of Justice	**175**	**81%**
DJ Hero	**186**	**91%**
It's just like playing *Guitar Hero* for the first time all over again, although *DJ Hero* is slightly more expensive.		
DJ Hero 2	198	88%
Dragon Age: Origins	**186**	**82%**
Dragon Ball: Raging Blast	186	40%
Dragon Ball Z: Burst Limit	**168**	**61%**
Dynasty Warriors: Gundam	160	40%
Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2	**176**	**43%**
Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce	189	37%
Dynasty Warriors 6	**164**	**30%**
Dynasty Warriors 6: Empires	181	44%
EA Sports Active 2	**200**	**81%**
EA Sports MMA	198	89%
Eat Lead	**178**	**38%**
Enchanted Arms	152	69%
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	**168**	**60%**
Enslaved: Odyssey To The West	197	83%
Eternal Sonata	**176**	**87%**
Everybody's Golf 5*	158	88%
Everybody's Golf: World Tour	**165**	**91%**
Eye Of Judgment	159	65%
EyePet	**185**	**83%**
EyePet: Move	197	84%
F1 2010	**197**	**86%**
FaceBreaker	170	55%
Fairytale Fights	**186**	**51%**
Fallout 3	**173**	**97%**
Fallout 3 lives up to its promise and then some. It's a damning portrayal of the consequences of war, and a compelling RPG experience.		
Fallout: New Vegas	**198**	**88%**
Fantastic Four: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	155	39%
Far Cry 2	**172**	**74%**
F.E.A.R.	151	81%
F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	**176**	**87%**

game	issue	score
FIFA 08	159	84%
FIFA 09	**171**	**87%**
FIFA 10	**184**	**90%**
The best football game made marginally better. The crown held by *PES* seems like so long ago now.		
FIFA 11	**197**	**91%**
FIFA continues to improve and continues to dominate with this latest addition to the superior footy franchise.		
FIFA Street 3	**163**	**66%**
FIFA World Cup 2010	192	70%
Fight Night Round 3	**151**	**87%**
Fight Night Round 4	181	84%
Final Fantasy XIII	**190**	**85%**
Fist Of The North Star: Ken's Rage	198	51%
Folklore	**158**	**66%**
Formula One Championship Edition	151	72%
Fracture	**171**	**72%**
Front Mission Evolved	198	52%
Fuel	**180**	**49%**
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	151	69%
G-Force	**183**	**59%**
Genji: Days Of The Blade	151	38%
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	**157**	**83%**
Ghostbusters: The Videogame	180	80%
GI Joe	**183**	**22%**
God Of War Collection*	**188**	**93%**
Two of the greatest PS2 action games of all time come together at a bargain price. Essential purchase.		
God Of War III	**190**	**88%**
Gran Turismo 5	200	85%
Gran Turismo 5 Prologue	**165**	**75%**
Grand Theft Auto IV	**166**	**98%**
Green Day: Rock Band	194	77%
GTA: Episodes From Liberty City	**191**	**94%**
Two fine expansions bundled together and without the need for *GTA IV* to play them. What more could you want.		
Guitar Hero III	**160**	**90%**
Guitar Hero III is another great rhythm-action beast, sure to delight fans and newcomers alike. So, grab a guitar and rock out!		
Guitar Hero 5	184	81%
Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	**168**	**63%**
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	182	76%
Guitar Hero Metallica	**179**	**88%**
Guitar Hero: Van Halen	189	65%
Guitar Hero: Warriors Of Rock	**197**	**71%**
Guitar Hero World Tour	**173**	**95%**
Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part 1	**200**	**21%**
Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince	182	60%
Harry Potter: The Order Of The Phoenix	**155**	**32%**
Haze	167	64%
Heavenly Sword	**157**	**71%**
Heavy Rain	**189**	**94%**
It will certainly split opinion, but we absolutely love it. A valuable addition to the wonderful world of gaming.		
Heavy Rain: Move Edition	**198**	**70%**
Heroes Over Europe	184	48%
Hyperdimension Neptunia	**202**	**21%**
Ice Age 3: Dawn Of The Dinosaurs	182	47%
IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds Of Prey	**183**	**72%**
inFamous	180	81%
International Cricket 2010	**194**	**61%**
Iron Man	166	58%
Iron Man 2	**193**	**50%**
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	59%
James Bond 007: Blood Stone	**199**	**63%**

www.imagineshop.co.uk

This month's new entries

The newest games, freshly squeezed among all your old favourites

Killzone 3 PS3	80%	Lord Of Arcana PSP	65%
Marvel Vs Capcom 3 PS3	88%	Magic: The Gathering: Duels Of The Planeswalkers PSN	84%
DC Universe Online PS3	80%	echochrome II PSN	83%
Knights Contract PS3	53%	Risk: Factions PSN	80%
Hyperdimension Neptunia PS3	21%	Eat Them! PSN	60%
Warriors: Legends Of Troy PS3	14%	Tetris PSN	84%
Mindjack PS3	38%	Blokus PSN	54%
Trinity: Souls Of Zill O'll PS3	56%	Microbot PSN	51%
Gods Eater Burst PSP	88%	Top Darts PSN	71%
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together PSP	81%		

game	issue	score
James Cameron's Avatar: The Game	187	64%
John Daly's ProStroke Golf	**197**	**70%**
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	159	78%
Just Cause 2	**190**	**87%**
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	160	73%
Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days	**196**	**71%**
Katamari Forever	184	88%
Killzone 2	**176**	**93%**
Sony has proven that it has a PlayStation platform capable of supporting a truly world-class FPS. Best graphics ever.		
Killzone 3	**202**	**80%**
Knights Contract	202	53%
Kung Fu Rider	**196**	**65%**
Lair	158	52%
Last Rebellion	**191**	**42%**
Legend Of Spyro: Dawn Of The Dragon	174	54%
Legendary	**173**	**62%**
Lego Batman	173	65%
Lego Harry Potter: Years 1-4	**194**	**79%**
Lego Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	167	73%
Lego Indiana Jones 2: The Adventure Continues	**187**	**71%**
Lego Rock Band	187	75%
Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	**160**	**76%**
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust	180	24%
LittleBigPlanet	**172**	**94%**
Create, share and play. Sackboy heads up Media Molecule's highly customisable and adorable platformer.		
LittleBigPlanet 2	**201**	**96%**
An amazing game and something to get involved with even if you can't create your own stuff.		
Lord Of The Rings: Aragorn's Quest	**199**	**60%**
Lost Planet 2	192	75%
Lost Planet: Extreme Condition	**163**	**69%**
Lost: The Video Game	164	38%
LOTR: Conquest	**175**	**52%**
Madden NFL 07	151	82%
Madden NFL 08	**157**	**82%**
Madden NFL 09	170	83%
Madden NFL 10	**184**	**82%**
Madden NFL 11	196	84%
Mafia II	**196**	**81%**
MAG	189	68%
Majin And The Forsaken Kingdom	**199**	**72%**
Marvel Vs Capcom 3	202	88%
Marvel Ultimate Alliance	**151**	**64%**
Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2	185	57%
Mass Effect 2	**201**	**97%**
Why the hell are you reading this when you should be playing *Mass Effect 2* instead? GO GO GO.		
Medal Of Honor	198	86%
Medal Of Honor Airborne	**161**	**85%**
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	171	78%
Metal Gear Solid 4	**167**	**92%**
Not the final *Metal Gear Solid* game after all then. Still brilliant though, and still largely incomprehensible.		
Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire	151	37%
Modern Warfare 2	**186**	**94%**
A questionable single-player mode is rendered null and void by the best multiplayer we've ever played.		
Midnight Club: Los Angeles	173	84%
Mindjack	**202**	**38%**
Mini Ninjas	184	80%
Mirror's Edge	**173**	**71%**

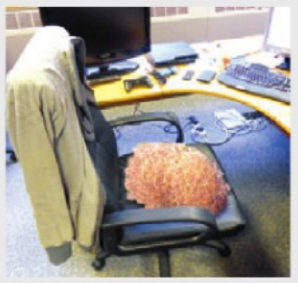
game	issue	score
ModNation Racers	**192**	**90%**
The best kart racer by far on the PlayStation 3, but combined with incredible levels of creativity. If you love *LBP* you'll love this, too.		
Monster Madness	**170**	**78%**
Mortal Kombat vs DC Universe	173	68%
MotoGP 08	**172**	**65%**
MotoGP 09/10	190	77%
MotorStorm	**151**	**92%**
MotorStorm: Pacific Rift	**172**	**93%**
MX Vs ATV Reflex	**189**	**68%**
MX Vs ATV Untamed	164	58%
nail'd	**201**	**61%**
Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm	174	59%
NASCAR 08	**157**	**38%**
Naughty Bear	195	64%
NBA 07	**153**	**33%**
NBA 2K7	151	76%
NBA 2K8	**172**	**71%**
NBA 2K10	186	79%
NBA 2K11	**199**	**82%**
NBA Jam	200	68%
NBA Live 08	**158**	**59%**
NBA Live 09	170	81%
NBA Street: Homecourt	**151**	**68%**
Need For Speed Carbon	151	76%
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit	**199**	**91%**
Hot Pursuit is one of the best arcade racers of all time – pure, unadulterated bliss in game form.		
Need For Speed ProStreet	**161**	**86%**
Need For Speed Shift	184	81%
Need For Speed Undercover	**173**	**75%**
Nier	192	54%
NHL 2K7	**151**	**80%**
NHL 2K9	172	67%
NHL 2K10	**186**	**70%**
NHL 09	170	88%
NHL 10	**184**	**85%**
NHL 11	198	89%
Ninja Gaiden Sigma	**154**	**88%**
Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2	184	82%
Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising	**185**	**78%**
Overlord: Raising Hell	167	65%
Overlord II	**181**	**68%**
Pain	183	69%
PES 2008	**159**	**70%**
PES 2009	172	80%
PES 2010	**185**	**72%**
PES 2011	197	73%
PixelJunk Racers	**160**	**74%**
POTC: At World's End	154	48%
Prince Of Persia	**174**	**83%**
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	193	68%
Prince Of Persia Trilogy	**200**	**88%**
Prison Break: The Conspiracy	191	40%
Prototype	**181**	**76%**
Pure	171	80%
Pure Football	**194**	**69%**
Quantum Of Solace	175	57%
Quantum Theory	**197**	**29%**
Race Driver: GRID	167	85%
Racket Sports	**198**	**37%**
Rainbow Six Vegas	155	88%
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	**164**	**78%**
Ratchet & Clank: A Crack In Time	186	82%
Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction	**160**	**72%**
Red Dead Redemption	**193**	**92%**
Relocates the familiar *GTA* formula to a superbly realised new setting and, in many ways, is unlike anything else as a result.		
Red Dead Redemption: Undead Nightmare	199	87%
Red Faction: Guerrilla	**180**	**80%**

game	issue	score
Resident Evil 5	177	86%
Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition	**190**	**86%**
Resistance: Fall Of Man	151	83%
Resistance 2	**173**	**90%**
With its impressive set pieces and glorious multiplayer mode, *Resistance 2* is one of the best FPSs on the PS3.		
Resonance Of Fate	191	79%
Ridge Racer 7	**151**	**75%**
Rise Of The Argonauts	176	58%
Rock Band	**169**	**94%**
Rock Band could be the best rhythm-action game ever. Especially if you're playing with a group of friends. Even better after a few beers.		
Rock Band 2	**179**	**96%**
With the incredible tracklist, tweaked engine, and new modes, this is easily the best rhythm-action game currently available.		
Rock Band 3	199	84%
Rogue Warrior	**188**	**09%**
R.U.S.E.	197	82%
Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	**180**	**76%**
Saints Row 2	172	79%
Saw	**186**	**52%**
Saw II: Flesh & Blood	198	36%
Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection	**177**	**85%**
SBK 08	172	55%
SBK X: Superbike World Championship	**193**	**67%**
Sega Rally	**158**	**92%**
Simply the best rally game on the PS3. Unless simulation is your bag then you'll want to go for *Colin McRae*. Not much in it, really.		
Sega Superstars Tennis	165	68%
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes	**198**	**76%**
Shaun White Skateboarding	198	70%
Shaun White Snowboarding	**173**	**72%**
Shellshock 2: Blood Trails	177	32%
Silent Hill: Homecoming	**174**	**64%**
Simpsons Game	160	82%
SingStar	**159**	**80%**
Singstar Guitar	199	70%
SingStar Pop Edition	**179**	**81%**
Singularity	195	80%
Skate	**159**	**86%**
Skate 2	175	82%
Skate 3	**192**	**86%**
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	190	78%
Sonic The Hedgehog	**151**	**52%**
Sonic Unleashed	175	48%
Soul Calibur IV	**169**	**94%**
Spider-Man 3	**155**	**33%**
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	197	69%
Spider-Man: Web Of Shadows	**173**	**55%**
Splatterhouse	200	58%
Splinter Cell Double Agent	**153**	**79%**
Split/Second: Velocity	**192**	**90%**
Just beating *Blur* to the chequered flag, *Split/Second* is a wonderfully intense racing game in the *Burnout* mould.		
Sports Champions	**196**	**83%**
Star Ocean: The Last Hope International	190	63%
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	**171**	**65%**
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	199	61%
Start The Party!	**196**	**72%**
Stormrise	178	51%
Stranglehold	**159**	**65%**
Street Fighter IV	**176**	**95%**
Stuntman: Ignition	**157**	**82%**
SuperCar Challenge	183	66%
Superstars V8: Next Challenge	**190**	**55%**
Superstars V8 Racing	181	63%

**denotes import review*

PLAY'S DIARY

DAY 1: Things started out as normal this month, with everyone doing the things they are usually assigned to do. Chris, for example, was asked to be Scouse and get lots of post. He did. Jon, to gather news and... newsify... it. He did.



DAY 3: But then things began to go what some people would call 'wrong', as the team started disappearing more and more frequently. Ian managed a total of about half a day in the office this month – something about 'an operation to get them removed'.

DAY 15: Halfway through the month it became apparent to Ryan that if he was to get anything out on the shelves this month he would have to work harder and be more committed than he had ever been before in his life.

DAY 16: But instead he went to a 'specialist' pub. Naturally. We're not entirely sure how we managed to produce such a high-quality slab of PlayStationy delights this month, but the proof is right here in your hands. Really – go back and admire this issue.

Having Ali on team vs No Ali

Having Ali on team

THERE WAS ONCE a time – let's call it last month – where we had a senior designer on staff by the name of Alison Innes. Those were days of plenty, days where anything we dreamed could become a reality. "Put Ryan's face over these breasts!" we would bellow at her, and she would do it. "Put Nick Jones's face over these breasts!" would be cried out from across the **Play** pod, and she would do it. "Something about breasts!" Jon would cry, but that would be ignored because it wasn't in Ali's remit. The amount of breast-related requests might have verged on the uncomfortable for any other design folks out there, but Ali was stoic in the face of such a demanding role. Proud and determined, she never let us down. Apart from the times she let us down

4/10 arts out of art

Not having Ali on team

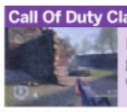
WE'RE WORRIED WE'LL run out of art with Ali gone. While our fresh-faced greenhorn has taken to the reins with gay abandon, there's the natural trepidation that comes with entering the unknown. On the other hand, we enter a brave new world of potential and hope, where we can dream of a brighter tomorrow – the kind of bright tomorrow we could never have hoped for under the tyranny of Ali. She was, after all, a tyrant. We dare admit it now she's gone. Ryan is editor only in name, and Aaron only keeps his 'in-chief' tag because Ali let it be so. She was always the one with the real power. Moving her away from us allows the **Play** team to breathe a sigh of relief. Though, naturally, we are still terrified she'll come back and terrorise us all the more for making these bold proclamations.

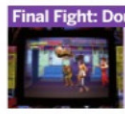
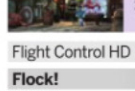
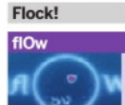
3.5/10 arts out of art

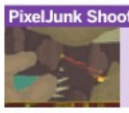
game	issue	score
Super Street Fighter IV	**191**	**90%**
The fact that you're buying a lot of stuff you've probably bought already is the only drawback to what is the best fighter ever made.		
Tekken 6	**184**	**94%**
There are flaws that hurt the experience, but nothing, *nothing*, stops *Tekken 6* from being an intense, tactical and brilliant fighting game.		
The Beatles: Rock Band	**184**	**96%**
It's a gorgeous game that'll make Beatles fans feel like they're being swaddled in a veil of pure joy. A breathtaking product.		
The Bourne Conspiracy	168	72%
The Club	**163**	**80%**
The Darkness	**154**	**91%**
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	**152**	**91%**
This proves once and for all that Western RPGs are better than Japanese ones! Sort of. Whatever, *Oblivion* is an awesome game.		
The Fight	199	42%
The Godfather	**151**	**37%**
The Godfather II	178	38%
The Golden Compass	**162**	**32%**
The Incredible Hulk	168	52%
The King Of Fighters XII	**182**	**82%**
The Orange Box	**161**	**93%**
Five brilliant games for the price of one, what on Earth could be better than that? Nothing, that's what. *Absolutely nothing.*		
The Saboteur	**187**	**67%**
The Shoot	199	76%
The Sims 3	**199**	**87%**
The Sly Collection	200	84%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	**151**	**88%**
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08	158	73%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	**171**	**86%**
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	181	69%
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	**194**	**60%**
Time Crisis 4	166	69%
Time Crisis: Razing Storm	**199**	**58%**
TimeShift	162	72%
TNA Impact!	**171**	**71%**
Tom Clancy's EndWar	173	80%
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X	**177**	**75%**
Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2	196	69%
Tomb Raider: Underworld	**173**	**83%**
Tony Hawk's Project 8	151	85%
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	**160**	**72%**
Tony Hawk: Ride	188	52%
Top Spin 3	**168**	**71%**
Tornado Outbreak	186	56%
Toy Story 3	**195**	**82%**
Transformers: Revenge Of The Fallen	182	41%
Transformers: The Game	**156**	**34%**
Transformers: War For Cybertron	194	80%
Trinity: Souls Of Zill O'll	**202**	**56%**
Trinity Universe	194	61%
Tron Evolution	**200**	**17%**
Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty	165	40%
Turok	**163**	**46%**
TV Superstars	199	53%
UEFA EURO 2008	**165**	**62%**
UFC Undisputed 2009	**180**	**90%**
Undisputed is gorgeous to look at, it's incredibly deep, and it's one of the most addictive fighters we've played in ages.		
UFC Undisputed 2010	193	88%
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune	**161**	**87%**
Uncharted 2: Among Thieves	**185**	**96%**
Among Thieves has proven itself to be a real work of class. It's one of the best games in recent years.		
Unreal Tournament III	**162**	**88%**
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	151	54%
Valkyria Chronicles	**173**	**82%**
Vancouver 2010	189	76%
Vanquish	**197**	**93%**
A brilliant surprise from the developer of *Bayonetta* and easily one of the best games we've played in 2010.		
Viking: Battle For Asgard	**165**	**74%**

game	issue	score
Virtua Fighter 5	151	83%
Virtua Tennis 2009	**180**	**80%**
Virtua Tennis 3	**150**	**91%**
Pick-up-and-play gameplay strikes another blow, proving that the PS3 is currently at its best when it keeps it simple.		
Wanted: Weapons Of Fate	**179**	**63%**
Warhawk	157	84%
Warriors: Legends Of Troy	**202**	**14%**
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	183	55%
Way Of The Samurai 3	**190**	**16%**
Wet	184	41%
Wheelman	**178**	**72%**
Where The Wild Things Are	188	56%
White Knight Chronicles	**190**	**55%**
Wolfenstein	183	72%
World Snooker Championship 2007	**151**	**56%**
WRC: FIA World Rally Championship	197	76%
WSC REAL 09: World Snooker Championship	**177**	**67%**
WWE Legends Of Wrestlemania	178	80%
WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2008	**159**	**88%**
WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2009	173	74%
WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2010	**185**	**77%**
WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2011	199	63%
X-Blades	**178**	**54%**
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	179	71%
Yakuza 3	**191**	**80%**
Yakuza 4*	193	75%

PS STORE LISTING

1942: Joint Strike	**170**	**74%**
3-On-3 NHL Arcade	177	62%
After Burner Climax	**193**	**91%**
Classic, frantic and utterly brilliant arcade action from Sega. A fine example of what the company is best known for.		
Age Of Booty	172	81%
Alien Breed: Impact	**196**	**80%**
Alien Breed 2: Assault	201	82%
Anarchy: Rush Hour	**194**	**73%**
Aqua Panic	193	68%
Battlefield 1943	**182**	**89%**
Beat Sketcher	201	85%
Bishi Bashi Special!	**175**	**61%**
Bionic Commando Rearmed	169	88%
Blacklight: Tango Down	**200**	**64%**
Blade Kitten	197	72%
Blast Factor	**152**	**72%**
Blokus	**202**	54%
Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries		
Of Little Riddle Episode I	**188**	**65%**
Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries		
Of Little Riddle Episode II	188	61%
Blue Toad Murder Files Episodes 4/5/6	**193**	**70%**
Bomberman Ultra	185	82%
Braid	**188**	**93%**
We had to wait quite a while, but time is what we have plenty of both with and for *Braid*. Simply brilliant.		
Burn Zombie Burn	**178**	**85%**
Call Of Duty Classic	**188**	**90%**
 It doesn't have *MW2*'s polish but it's a great game both as a slice of history and in its own right.		
Calling All Cars	**155**	**81%**
Castle Crashers	200	88%
Catan	**195**	**85%**
Comet Crash	186	84%
Command & Conquer: Red Alert	**168**	**70%**
Command & Conquer Red Alert: Retaliation	176	55%
Command & Conquer Red Alert 3:		
Commander's Challenge	**185**	**68%**
Command & Conquer	175	44%
Cool Boarders	**173**	**57%**
Cool Boarders 2	175	31%
Costume Quest	**199**	**70%**
Crash Bandicoot	172	77%

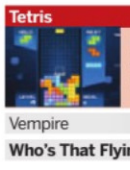
game	issue	score
Crash Bandicoot 3: Warped	**174**	**82%**
Crash Commando	174	80%
Crash Team Racing	**170**	**79%**
Crazy Taxi	200	80%
Crescent Pale Mist	**200**	**70%**
Critter Crunch	**188**	**91%**
This is yet another beautiful, cute and high-class puzzler on the PSN that works perfectly and is a joy to play.		
Crystal Defenders	**184**	**48%**
Dark Mist	164	53%
Dead Nation	**201**	**86%**
Dead Space: Ignition	199	47%
DeathSpank	**195**	**83%**
Destruction Derby	01	80%
.detuned	**186**	**50%**
Digger HD	186	52%
Diner Dash	**190**	**66%**
Driver	**171**	**90%**
With the most cinematic car chases ever seen in a game, *Driver* made a huge impact in 1998. Despite ropey graphics, it's still a playable title.		
Droplitz	**184**	**91%**
Droplitz is a superb puzzler that blends *Rez*-style layers of music, pipes and dials to create one of the most satisfying puzzlers in years.		
Earthworm Jim HD	**196**	**89%**
Eat Them!	**202**	60%
echochrome II	**202**	83%
echochrome	169	85%
Elefunk	**170**	**45%**
Everybody's Golf 2	62	83%
Fade To Black	**09**	**44%**
Fat Princess	183	65%
Fatal Inertia EX	**168**	**65%**
FIFA 09 Ultimate Team	178	61%
Final Fight: Double Impact	**193**	**90%**
 This scrolling-fighter classic from 1989 makes an almost faultless appearance on PSN. Stick it on your download list.		
Final Fantasy VII	**181**	**96%**
Even after all these years it still holds up. In fact, our mark seems to have gone up 3% since 1997.		
Final Fantasy VIII	**190**	**90%**
A truly engaging RPG – if you've never experienced the game before then make sure this is the next thing you download.		
Final Fantasy IX	**195**	**90%**
 Never gets the love it deserves, but this PSN release gives you the chance to experience Square Enix's refreshing RPG all over again.		
Flight Control HD	198	85%
Flock!	**179**	**70%**
flOw	**151**	**90%**
 Another 90% game for the PS3, another lesson in simple, addictive gameplay. *flOw* is an innovative title available on the Network.		
Flower	**176**	**85%**
Frogger Returns	190	35%
Funky Lab Rat	**201**	**70%**
G-Police	27	84%
Geon	**175**	**71%**
Go! Puzzle	152	58%
Gran Turismo HD	**150**	**75%**
Gravity Crash	187	85%
Greed Corp	**191**	**75%**
GTI Club+	174	72%
Gundemonium Collection	**197**	**80%**
Gunstar Heroes	181	85%
Hamsterball	**194**	**72%**
Hardcore 4x4	15	81%
Hasbro Family Game Night	**187**	**60%**
Heavy Weapon	187	75%
High Velocity Bowling	**163**	**50%**
Hi-Octane	178	64%
Hustle Kings	**190**	**87%**
Hyperballoid HD	188	70%
Inferno Pool	**181**	**81%**
International Track & Field	171	80%
Interpol: The Trail Of Doctor Chaos	**185**	**48%**

game	issue	score
Invincible Tiger: The Legend Of Han Tao	185	70%
Jet Rider 2	**176**	**71%**
Joe Danger	**194**	**96%**
Simply put, *Joe Danger* is one of the best games you'll currently find on the PSN. Buy it. Buy it now.		
Judge Dredd	**18**	**19%**
Jumping Flash	172	55%
Kick-Ass The Game	**194**	**60%**
Kula World	172	71%
Kung-Fu Live	**201**	**42%**
Landit Bandit	195	66%
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light	**198**	**90%**
Lara is back to her best in *The Guardian Of Light*. *Tomb Raider* fans will love it and for just £9.99 everyone else should, too.		
Lead & Gold: Gangs Of The Wild West	193	65%
Lemmings	**151**	**79%**
Linger In Shadows	173	69%
LocoRoco Cocoreccho!	**159**	**80%**
Lumines Supernova	**178**	**90%**
Madden NFL Arcade	188	58%
Magic Carpet	**179**	**65%**
Magic: The Gathering: Duels Of The Planeswalkers	202	84%
Marvel Vs Capcom 2	**182**	**90%**
This game has an astonishing amount to offer if you're prepared to plunge into its murky depths.		
Matt Hazard: Blood Bath And Beyond	189	69%
MediEvil	**173**	**45%**
Mega Man 9	172	75%
Mega Man 10	**192**	**82%**
Metal Gear Solid	**187**	**93%**
While it looks rather rough now, the game itself remains a real high point in the franchise. Simply essential.		
Metal Gear Solid Online	175	45%
Microbot	**202**	**51%**
Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge Special Edition	**195**	**94%**
The HD remake of arguably the best game in the *Monkey Island* series is a more than welcome addition to the PSN.		
Motorhead	**173**	**60%**
Namco Museum Essentials	193	60%
Noby Noby Boy	**177**	**85%**
Nucleus	155	82%
Numblast	**183**	**60%**
N20	37	70%
OutRun Online Arcade	**180**	**80%**
Pac-Man Championship Edition DX	**201**	**91%**
Bold, bright, insanely addictive – this re-imagining of the retro classic is an essential addition to anybody's PSN library.		
Pain	183	69%
Peggle	**189**	**94%**
So addictive it should come with some sort of government warning. Terrific value for money and a superb little puzzle game.		
PixelJunk Eden	**169**	**67%**
PixelJunk Monsters	**163**	**94%**
The second game in the *PixelJunk* series is great fun and brilliantly addictive. Buy it and play it constantly for hours on end!		
PixelJunk Shooter	**187**	**93%**
 Q-Games delivers excellence on the PSN once again with its *PixelJunk* series, this time in the form of a classic shoot-'em-up.		
Piyotama	162	62%
Planet Minigolf	**196**	**58%**
Polar Panic	190	65%
Populous: The Beginning	**46**	**70%**
Prince Of Persia Classic	173	67%
Puzzle Chronicles	**194**	**70%**
Puzzle Quest Galactrix	181	68%
Q*bert	**58**	**53%**
Rag Doll Kung Fu: Fists Of Plastic	179	83%
Rampage: World Tour	**29**	**77%**
Ratchet & Clank: Quest For Booty	170	69%
Rayman	**01**	**76%**

game	issue	score
Revenge Of The Wounded Dragons	191	60%
Riff: Everyday Shooter	**162**	**86%**
Risk: Factions	202	80%
Rocket Knight	**194**	**74%**
Rocketmen: Axis Of Evil	165	63%
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 1	**194**	**90%**
Clever, funny and taxing in all the right ways, we're very happy that the Freelance Police are on PlayStation 3.		
Sam & Max: The Devil's Playhouse Episode 2	**194**	**92%**
This is even better than the first episode due to the fact it has better puzzles and even funnier dialogue.		
Savage Moon	**175**	**87%**
Scott Pilgrim Vs The World	197	77%
Section 8	**193**	**78%**
Shank	197	86%
Shatter	**183**	**91%**
Sheep	171	78%
Siren Blood Curse	**170**	**62%**
Smash Cars	184	50%
SOCOM Confrontation	**178**	**55%**
Soldner-X 2: Final Prototype	195	70%
Sonic 4: Episode One	**199**	**82%**
Sonic Adventure	198	63%
Spin Jam	**174**	**32%**
Syphon Filter	**48**	**93%**
Gabe Logan's gritty PSone adventure has shadowed all that came after. As always, the original really is best.		
Snakeball	176	92%
Star Trek: D-A-C	**189**	**57%**
Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dream	159	57%
Street Skater 2	**178**	**40%**
Super Puzzle Fighter II HD Turbo Remix	168	78%
Super Rub-A-Dub	**151**	**83%**
Supersonic Acrobatic Rocket-Powered Battle-Cars	177	65%
Super Stardust HD	**155**	**74%**
Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix	176	72%
Switchball	**191**	**75%**
Swords And Soldiers	199	88%
Syphon Filter 3	**170**	**80%**
Tales Of Monkey Island	**196**	**91%**
Telltale Games' excellent modern addition to the *Monkey Island* franchise finally sees the light of day on PSN. Go pick it up.		
Tank Battles	**186**	**68%**
Tekken HD	150	80%
Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection Online	**161**	**87%**
Tetris	**202**	**84%**
The Last Guy	**171**	**91%**
Snake meets *Pac-Man* meets GoogleMaps, *The Last Guy* is yet another innovative and compelling addition to the PSN's line-up.		
The Punisher: No Mercy	**182**	**49%**
The Secret Of Monkey Island Special Edition	**195**	**92%**
LucasArts' classic point-and-click adventure gets an HD makeover and will hopefully be the first of many classics heading to PSN.		
Theme Hospital	32	80%
Theme Park	**174**	**80%**
TMNT: Turtles in Time Re-shelled	186	57%
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six	**54**	**34%**
Top Darts	202	71%
Top Gun	198	53%
Topotai: Spinning Through The Worlds	**183**	**61%**
ToyHome	162	31%
Trash Panic	**181**	**79%**
Trials Of Topaq	159	50%
Trine	**184**	**85%**
Tumble	198	70%
Uno	**189**	**85%**
Vagrant Story	189	82%
Vandal Hearts: Flames Of Judgment	**192**	**87%**
Wakeboarding HD	192	65%
Warhawk: Operation Fallen Star	**171**	**80%**
Watchmen: The End Is Nigh	183	55%
WipEout	**01**	**89%**
WipEout HD	172	84%
Wolfenstein	**181**	**70%**

game	issue	score
Worms	**179**	**91%**
There's a reason *Worms* is still going strong, and that's because people never get tired of its fun personality and addictive gameplay.		
Worms 2: Armageddon	198	87%
Worms Battle Islands	**201**	**80%**
Zuma	182	78%

PSP minis LISTING

A Space Shooter For Two Bucks	202	55%
Alien Havoc	**186**	**68%**
Angry Birds	**202**	**93%**
Flinging birds at stuff for four times the price of the original in a less-functional fashion than before has never been so much fun.		
Bloons	186	65%
Brainpipe	**186**	**70%**
BreakQuest	186	45%
Edge	**202**	**85%**
Field Runners	186	85%
Fortix	**186**	**57%**
Funky Punch	186	49%
Hero Of Sparta	**186**	**57%**
I Must Run!	202	70%
Kahoots	186	88%
NOVA: Near Orbit Vanguard Alliance	202	63%
Pinball Fantasies	**186**	**90%**
Pinball Fantasies was originally released on the Amiga and features four tables and some excellent pinball gaming.		
Puzzle Scape	**186**	**75%**
Sky Force	**202**	**68%**
Tetris	**186**	**93%**
 How it is possible to make Tetris feel so fresh and so much fun again we don't know, but it's managed here.		
Vempire	186	67%
Who's That Flying?!	**202**	**64%**

PSP LISTING

300: March To Glory	152	59%
Ace Combat X	**147**	**72%**
Ace Combat: Joint Assault	194	79%
After Burner: Black Falcon	**152**	**82%**
Ape Academy	134	44%
Ape Academy 2	**145**	**52%**
Ape Escape P	140	37%
Army Of Two: The 40th Day	**190**	**45%**
Assassin's Creed: Bloodlines	187	77%
Astonishia Story	**142**	**68%**
Beaterator	186	72%
Blade Dancer: Lineage Of Light	**145**	**45%**
BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger Portable	194	84%
Blood Bowl	**184**	**53%**
Bomberman	150	83%
Boulder Dash: Rocks!	**165**	**69%**
Breath Of Fire III	138	82%
Brothers In Arms: D-Day	**149**	**69%**
Burnout Dominator	153	65%
Burnout Legends	**134**	**94%**
Despite being more of a 'best of' than a completely new game, *Legends* is the best racing game on the PSP.		
Buzz! Brain Bender	175	68%
Capcom Classics Collection Reloaded	**147**	**80%**
Capcom Classics Collection Remixed	141	72%
Cars	**143**	**60%**
Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles	163	78%
Championship Manager	**137**	**65%**
Championship Manager 2006	140	32%
Cid The Dummy	**180**	**32%**
Coded Arms	134	53%
Call Of Duty: Roads To Victory	**153**	**69%**
Colin McRae Rally 2005 Plus	134	84%
Crisis Core – Final Fantasy VII	**167**	**87%**
Crush	154	80%

**denotes import review*

GAMING CLICHES & VIDEOGAME LOGIC

EVERYTHING IS RUBBISH

NOW WE'RE NOT really known for our relentless positivity – we will always be honest about things and call them down the line – just look at how many people wanted to lop off our collective head for our decision to score *God Of War III* 'just' 88%. However, being critical in this sense is very different to how the gaming world as a whole seems to be critical.

At the time of writing, the PSP2 (NGP) has just been announced, and it's immediately been hit by a wave

of what can only be described as *fury*. People are beside themselves that the system doesn't have this, or does have that. There are some voices fighting against this tide, like ours, but there's just *so much* negativity. It's silly.

What would it be like to live in a world where people react reasonably to things? We have

no idea. But then, we would probably be whinging that that was the cliché there – "people are always so relentlessly logical in their analysis!" we would cry. But we don't live there. We live in Captain Cliché's Negativille, and it's all a bit tiring.

It's the biggest cliché in videogaming and, to be perfectly honest, it's really

incredibly boring. We're not saying you have to love everything, we're just asking people to think before blindly reacting and dismissing something completely out of hand. Though, to be fair, we would say that – we have a massive pro-bias for anything Sony does, and we don't like people ragging on the company's new handheld.

JOBS IAN DRANSFIELD WOULD BE GREAT AT #2 ARTIST

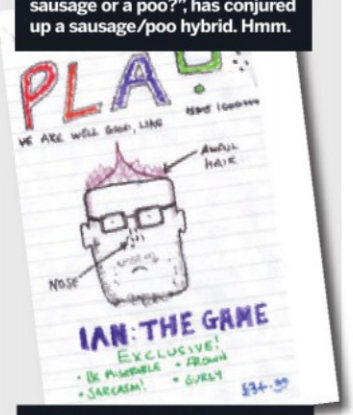
(or 'drawist', as Ian calls them)

WITH ALI GONE we had to look for a replacement, otherwise our cover would never get designed. Fortunately, the whole **Play** team drew their own take on the front of the issue. Turns out we did actually need a new designer.

Jon's good at everything, it seems. Be shit at something Jon! Like darts. Yeah. Let's try darts.

True story: Ryan got an F for his GCSE Art, so his certificate now says (F) Art. Do you see? LOLZ.

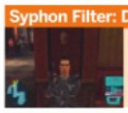
Chris, who once said "is that a sausage or a poo?", has conjured up a sausage/poo hybrid. Hmm.



The exclusive fell through so we put *Uncharted 3* on the cover.

game	issue	score
Dante's Inferno	**191**	**76%**
Dead Or Alive: Paradise	192	56%
Disgaea: Afternoon Of Darkness	**161**	**92%**
An absolute must-have for RPG fans, and one of the best titles available on the PSP. A simply brilliant game.		
Dissidia: Final Fantasy	184	60%
Disgaea 2: Dark Hero Days	**190**	**87%**
Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai 2	154	50%
Driver 76	**154**	**68%**
Dungeons & Dragons: Tactics	159	55%
Dungeon Siege: Throne Of Agony	**148**	**85%**
Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce	179	69%
EA Replay	**147**	**74%**
echochrome	169	85%
echoshift	**191**	**73%**
Everybody's Golf 2	167	86%
Everybody's Tennis	**195**	**88%**
Every Extend Extra	145	84%
Exit	**138**	**65%**
EyePet	199	77%
F1 2009	**187**	**66%**
F1 Grand Prix	134	81%
Field Commander	**145**	**83%**
FIFA 06	136	43%
FIFA 07	**147**	**81%**
FIFA 11	198	69%
FIFA World Cup 2010	**193**	**65%**
Fired Up	134	60%
Final Fantasy	**164**	**63%**
Final Fantasy Tactics	159	86%
FlatOut: Head On	**164**	**79%**
Football Manager 2007	147	62%
Football Manager Handheld	**139**	**82%**
Football Manager Handheld 2008	161	49%
Football Manager Handheld 2010	**187**	**60%**
Formula One 06	143	78%
Frantix	**136**	**36%**
Gangs Of London	144	65%
Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2	**157**	**42%**
Ghost Recon Predator	200	60%
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	**188**	**55%**
Gitaroo Man Lives!	144	79%
Go! Sudoku	**137**	**45%**
Gods Eater Burst	202	88%
God Of War: Chains Of Olympus	165	84%
God Of War: Ghost Of Sparta	**199**	**79%**
Gradius Collection	144	80%
Gran Turismo	**184**	**85%**
Gripshift	136	81%
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	**185**	**95%**
Bar some combat control issues, *GTA: Chinatown Wars* has perfectly translated to the PSP. It's a must-have game.		
GTA: Liberty City Stories	**135**	**95%**
Successfully taking the *GTA* formula and putting it on one UMD of pure goodness, this is one of the PSP's best games.		
GTA: Vice City Stories	**147**	**96%**
Half-Minute Hero	191	87%
Harry Potter And The Goblet Of Fire	**136**	**69%**
Hellboy: Science Of Evil	170	60%
Holy Invasion Of Privacy, Badman!		
What Did I Do To Deserve This?	**186**	**73%**
Hot Pixel	155	73%
Indiana Jones And The Staff Of Kings	**181**	**60%**
Infected	141	68%
Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon	**154**	**70%**
International Athletics	170	40%
Invizimals	**187**	**71%**
Jak And Daxter: The Lost Frontier	187	59%
Juiced: Eliminator	**141**	**70%**
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	160	80%
Kao Challengers	**137**	**60%**
Killzone: Liberation	146	83%
Kingdom Hearts: Birth By Sleep	**196**	**88%**
Lemmings	138	63%
LittleBigPlanet	**186**	**90%**
Refined in certain areas and slightly worse in Create mode but still a fantastic addition to PSP's lineup.		

game	issue	score
LocoRoco	**143**	**94%**
We called this the definitive PSP title in our review, and it is a game that no PSP owner should be without.		
LocoRoco 2	173	82%
LocoRoco Midnight Carnival	**186**	**81%**
Lord Of Arcana	202	65%
Lumines II	**137**	**74%**
Madden NFL 06	137	74%
Marvel Trading Cards	**155**	**38%**
Me And My Katamari	138	86%
Medal Of Honor Heroes	**147**	**72%**
Medievil Resurrection	134	53%
Mercury Meltdown	**145**	**66%**
Metal Slug Anthology	**150**	**91%**
Metal Gear Ac!d 2	**138**	**92%**
Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker	**193**	**92%**
A fantastic entry in the *Metal Gear Solid* series and one of the best games on PSP. Wonderful.		
Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	**150**	**91%**
A proper *Metal Gear Solid* game on a portable machine. It was never likely to disappoint, and it didn't. A great title.		
Miami Vice	**144**	**82%**
Micro Machines V4	142	71%
Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	**134**	**57%**
ModNation Racers	193	70%
Monster Hunter Freedom	**140**	**81%**
Monster Hunter Freedom 2	157	59%
Monster Hunter Freedom Unite	**181**	**77%**
MotoGP	146	75%
Motorstorm: Arctic Edge	**184**	**72%**
Mytran Wars	179	85%
Namco Museum Battle Collection	**136**	**68%**
Naruto Shippuden Legends: Akatsuki Rising	185	46%
Naruto Ultimate Ninja Heroes 2	**169**	**46%**
NBA Ballers: Rebound	139	61%
Need For Speed Undercover	**175**	**57%**
Need For Speed Most Wanted	136	73%
No Heroes Allowed	**199**	**69%**
OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast	**139**	**93%**
PaRappa The Rapper	155	88%
Patapon	**163**	**86%**
Patapon 2	177	87%
Patchwork Heroes	**192**	**85%**
Pirates Of The Caribbean	143	52%
PixelJunk Monster Deluxe	**185**	**86%**
Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	163	77%
Pocket Racers	**144**	**49%**
PoPoLoCRoIS	142	71%
Power Stone Collection	**145**	**88%**
PQ – Practical Intelligence Quotient	141	52%
Prince Of Persia Revelations	**138**	**69%**
Prince Of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	194	52%
Prinny: Can I Really Be The Hero?	**181**	**80%**
PSN Collection: Power Pack	173	70%
PSN Collection: Puzzle Pack	**173**	**54%**
Pursuit Force	134	83%
Pursuit Force: Extreme Justice	**159**	**76%**
Puzzle Chronicles	190	61%
Puzzle Quest	**153**	**66%**
R-Type Tactics	170	74%
Rainbow Six Vegas	**156**	**78%**
Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters	154	78%
Rengoku 2	**144**	**72%**
Resistance: Retribution	177	76%
Ridge Racer 2	**145**	**78%**
Ridge Racer	**132**	**91%**
Arguably the best launch game on the PSP, *Ridge Racer* still stands up as one of the finest racing games for the system.		
Rock Band Unplugged	**181**	**92%**
Unplugged comes highly recommended. It's superb – there are few better rhythm-action games on the handheld.		
Rocky Balboa	150	68%
Secret Agent Clank	**169**	**79%**
Sega Mega Drive Collection	177	79%

game	issue	score
Sega Rally	**158**	**90%**
Very nearly as good as its PlayStation 3 counterpart. Which is a good thing because that's the best rally game money can buy.		
Shinobido: Tales Of The Ninja	150	60%
Silent Hill Origins	**160**	**87%**
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories	190	52%
Smash Court Tennis	**154**	**58%**
SOCOM Fire Team 2	154	70%
SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo 3	**190**	**71%**
SOCOM: Tactical Strike	160	85%
SOCOM: US Navy SEALs Fireteam Bravo	**140**	**69%**
Sonic Rivals	147	70%
Sonic Rivals 2	**162**	**35%**
Soul Calibur: Broken Destiny	**183**	**92%**
New modes and characters keep things interesting, while fights are as hectic and solid as ever.		
Spider-Man 3	**162**	**32%**
Spinout	149	81%
Splinter Cell: Essentials	**139**	**71%**
Split/Second: Velocity	200	71%
SSX On Tour	**138**	**76%**
Star Ocean: Second Evolution	178	78%
Star Trek: Tactical Assault	**148**	**59%**
Star Wars Battlefront II	137	74%
Star Wars Battlefront: Elite Squadron	**187**	**65%**
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	148	69%
Star Wars: Renegade Squadron	**160**	**78%**
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max	138	70%
Street Riders	**140**	**29%**
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	142	54%
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	**140**	**90%**
 In the absence of a 'real' *MGS* game, it's left to Gabe Logan to carry the stealthy torch, and he does a fine job.		
Tekken 6	**187**	**90%**
Fantastic to look at and fast and fluid to play, *Tekken 6* is the best game of the series on PSP.		
Tekken: Dark Resurrection	**143**	**92%**
Tekken: Dark Resurrection is instantly playable and provides the PSP's first great brawler.		
Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together	**202**	**81%**
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	179	71%
Tenchu: Time Of The Assassins	**146**	**51%**
The Con	153	59%
The Cube	**153**	**64%**
The Eye Of Judgment: Legends	191	57%
The Godfather Mob Wars	**136**	**66%**
The Lord Of The Rings: Tactics	136	66%
The Sims 2	**137**	**71%**
TNA Impact! Cross The Line	189	58%
TOCA 3	**152**	**70%**
Tokobot	140	79%
Tomb Raider: Anniversary	**156**	**81%**
Tomb Raider: Legend	140	72%
Twisted Metal Head-On	**134**	**54%**
UFC Undisputed 2010	197	80%
Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins	**145**	**88%**
Undead Knights	189	46%
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code	**140**	**59%**
Valhalla Knights	158	49%
Valkyria Chronicles 2	**196**	**87%**
Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth	153	78%
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble	**140**	**82%**
Virtua Tennis 3	152	88%
Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	**161**	**70%**
What Did I Do To Deserve This My Lord!? 2	192	78%
WipEout Pulse	**159**	**86%**
WipEout Pure	**138**	**91%**
Exceeding all of our expectations as to what a handheld *WipEout* game could be, *Pure* is an essential PSP purchase.		
World Of Pool	156	43%
World Tour Poker	**141**	**67%**
World Tour Soccer 2	142	40%
Worms: Open Warfare 2	**157**	**80%**
WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2006	137	84%
WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2007	**147**	**80%**
World Rally Championship	134	67%

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Rocksteady tells you why it will blow you away

PORTAL 2

Huge review peels away the hype to reveal the truth

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And we literally mean the *best* feature ever

ANARCHY REIGNS

Is it the new Bayonetta or an even crazier Vanquish?

Issue 204 includes

FREE PS3 DVD AND 68-PAGE BOOK

Back Page

IT'S THE EA GAME SCORE-O-METER!

We've noticed a trend in the recent scoring of EA games by a certain member of staff. As such, we decided to employ SCIENCE to figure out whether or not there was indeed method to his madness (also known as 'irrefutable fact').
To the Sciencing Pit!

GAME x Y (+ 500/4.5
NN) 32B YYYY / 4C -
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43 - 23 x GAME + Y + X
- X + X - xxx (32 x X x X)
Y x Y / Y + X x Y

Did Ian review it?

de blob 2

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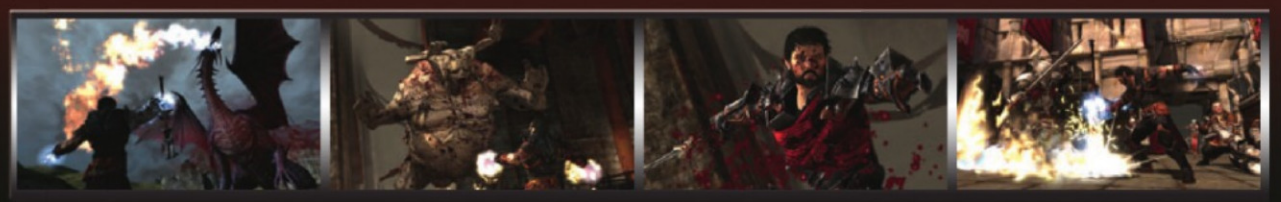

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